DOCTOR OF EDUCATION (EDD)

How Cultural Constructs of the Mind Influence the Experience of Mindfulness and Learning

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Award date:
2020

Awarding institution:
University of Bath

How Cultural Constructs of the Mind Influence the Experience of Mindfulness and Learning

Volume 1 of 1

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Education

University of Bath

Department of Education

February 2020

DECLARATION OF ANY PREVIOUS SUBMISSION OF THE WORK

The material presented here for examination for the award of a higher degree by research has not been incorporated into a submission for another degree.

Monchaya Jetabut

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I am the author of this thesis, and the work described therein was carried out by myself personally.

Monchaya Jetabut

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Acknowledgements

The name Monchaya (Thai: มนชยา) means: "one who can conquer one's own will."

As a child, I did not fully understand the depth of meaning in my name. But over time, as I learned to embrace challenges as opportunities and consider possibilities in the unknown, I have become well acquainted with an inner strength bestowed upon me by my parents.

Firstly, I would like to thank my grandmother, Pradub Jetnarong, whose tough love and gentle soul planted the seeds to pursue a doctorate long ago.

I am deeply grateful to my sister, Jane, whose unwavering confidence and levity sustained me when I needed it most. Thank you to my Bath "B.O.B" friends whose encouragement and humor reminded me that we remained on this journey together. Thank you also, to my friends and colleagues far and wide, who showed interest in my studies and championed my efforts throughout the years.

Sincere thanks are also due to the two schools that supported my research. The exchanges and learnings acquired from the wonderful students in Amsterdam and Bangkok are priceless. The opportunity to engage with such insightful and candid young people was a gift.

Thank you to my professors at Bath who taught me the secret ingredient to a successful doctoral thesis: confidence.

Finally, this thesis is for my parents, Sukanda and Chairat Jetabut, who took a chance at opportunity and dedicated their entire lives to their daughters. Thank you for your endless support and teaching me to think-speak-act with love and kindness. Thank you for introducing me to Wat Thai D.C. and Luang Tha Chi to cultivate my understanding of our rich heritage and values. Most of all, thank you for giving me a name that instilled in me a fire that no challenge, not even a doctoral thesis, could extinguish.

ขอบพระคุณคุณพ่อคุณแม่ที่ให้โอกาส ความรู

และชีวิตที่เต็มไปด้วยความรักและความอบอุ่นค่ะ

กราบเท้าคุณพ่อคุณแม่ที่เคารพรักอย่างสูงค่ะ

Abstract

This thesis is an exploration in mindfulness and learning through the direct experiences of high school adolescents in Amsterdam and Bangkok. The research study uses a phenomenological paradigm to examine how cultural constructs of the mind influence student experience. This year-long qualitative study results in a deep dive analysis of four exemplar students. The extent to which cultural constructs of the mind influence the experience of mindfulness and learning is reflected in the student voice in both social contexts.

The literature review provides an account of the evolution and expansion of the phenomenon of mindfulness from its Buddhist roots to Western society, along with its present-day application within the educational context. The relationship between attention and mindfulness and the student experience of learning is also explored. The implications of policy borrowing and cross-cultural transference are noted, given the increased prevalence of mindfulness in schools programs internationally.

The analysis of themes and use of portraiture to illustrate the experiences of the exemplar students sheds light on how their understanding of the mind influences their experience of both mindfulness and learning. The nuances in language, coupled with the cultural constructs of the mind have a direct impact on how students engage with the phenomena. Furthermore, the overarching differences around student understanding of mindfulness, whether taught through a secular lens or established in a particular cultural ethos, influence whether it is viewed as a well-being strategy or a way of life.

The thesis concludes that one's understanding of mindfulness, along with the extent of one's relationship to its practice, can have an effect on the experience of learning.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview of the chapter

This chapter provides justification for the research project in the area of mindfulness in schools in two social contexts: Amsterdam and Bangkok. It introduces the origins of the research by expounding on the growing interest in mindfulness-based programs in schools on a global scale. It also provides some background on the researcher, accounting for both professional and personal motivations in pursuing this field of research. Lastly, it provides the rationale and context for exploring the effects of mindfulness practice on learning, outlines the aims of the research, and delves into student understanding of the mind. This study explores how different cultural constructs of the mind can influence understanding of mindfulness and in turn, impact individual student experience of learning.

1.2 The growing mindfulness movement

Mindfulness practice, once a custom associated exclusively within the Buddhist tradition of ascetic monks, has become an increasingly popular movement; astoundingly in vogue across cultural and national boundaries. The evolution of mindfulness customs from an Eastern tradition to mainstream Western society has gradually expanded into wide-ranging sectors and contexts including businesses, hospitals, and schools. While mindfulness meditation is a centuries-old practice, a steadily growing surge of evidence-based research has seemingly planted a compelling seed amongst practitioners across a variety of fields that mindfulness is in fact, good for everyone (Williams and Penman 2011).

In her keynote speech at the Council of International Schools Global Forum, Baroness Valerie Amos (2017), Director of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), spoke of a "world full of fragilities and uncertainties" and how it was incumbent upon educators to continue supporting students through such challenging and rapidly changing times. It seems that a shift in focus has taken place in education. Preparing students for the 21st century workforce has taken on a multifarious form that encompasses holistic preparation within both realms of academics and well-being.

The rapidly growing interest in mindfulness is an example of a coopted practice that has developed into an ethically questionable approach to resilience. This type of undertaking

is reminiscent of a neoliberal society that fosters the "enterprising student" who is empowered by the authority of psychological expertise to develop autonomous learning alongside flourishing lifelong attributes (Carr and Batlle 2015, Sugarman 2015: 112). The charge is increasingly to prepare students to be emotionally savvy, possess inner strength and uphold a mindset that is open and resilient. Whether this shift is viewed as a survival skill for students or merely a new way of being, what it looks like in practice has taken a number of varied forms.

To prioritize student well-being in the name of holistic education, numerous schools have researched concepts like *flourishing schools*, *growth versus fixed mindset*, *character education*, and a multitude of other programs based in positive psychology (Seligman 2011). Mindfulness, too, has become a household term and widespread practice within schools. While sharing an emphasis on well-being, what separates mindfulness from the aforementioned programs is the fact that it has been part of the fabric of Asian culture, religion, and tradition for centuries before it ever made its way into the classroom. In a sense, it is as old as humanity itself. Only recently has mindfulness been identified as a practice that can be detached from culture and religion and explored for its own sake.

The idea that the ancient practice of mindfulness has now made its way into mainstream culture and educational practice is rather revolutionary. Deeply inspired and intrigued by the divergence of thought from a global, political and social platform, I am honored to explore an area of research that dovetails both personal and professional pursuits. While mindfulness is a long-established practice in many traditional contexts, it is a nascent, albeit rapidly omnipresent concept within the context of education. Education of the whole child beyond that of subject based curriculum is another reason why so many schools internationally, whether independent or state-governed, have taken an interest in this vast mindfulness movement. In fact, in her research on the seven essential life skills that would support young people in achieving their full potential, Galinsky (2010) claims that the first critical area to establish is that of focus and self-control, which are fundamental offshoots of mindfulness.

1.2.1 Researcher's background and rationale for study

From a personal perspective, I find this flourishing interest in mindfulness a marvel to observe. Upon recognizing the synchronicity between my personal interest and

professional application within the school context, I decided to follow the stream of educators interested in learning how to apply mindfulness practice, secularly and pedagogically, within schools. Several years ago, I had applied to become a certified mindfulness instructor. I was rejected despite evidence of years of practice based on my Buddhist upbringing and attendance at numerous meditation retreats.

Because I had not completed an 8-week secular mindfulness course, a pre-requisite to this certified training, I was deemed as unqualified. This experience was cause for much contemplation about my past experience. It led to questions about how my lifelong practice might be different from someone who had only recently been introduced to mindfulness from an exclusively secular standpoint. Furthermore, it led me to wonder how anyone could effectively determine my depth of knowledge in this area.

Throughout my upbringing the concept of *ɜati (*Sanskrit *ɜmrti)*, the Pali word for mindfulness (Brahmapundit 2017; Sharf 2015; Thera 1962), was a natural, indelible facet of life. Wat Thai, Washington D.C., established on 4 July 1974, is all at once a congregation, language and culture school, dance and music center, and community hub (Wat Thai D.C. 2017). Regular attendance at Wat Thai provided a rich cultural backdrop that cultivated mindful thinking and identity formation as a Thai-American. Even the Thai greeting of placing both palms together and bowing one's head is a mindful action that, depending on hand placement and depth of the bow, can connote kinship to deep reverence. Every choice in thought, speech, and action involved careful deliberation.

This contemplative way of being was something I brought into every sector of my life, particularly my work as a school counselor. In a position where I am trusted to manage the pain of young people while nurturing hope and potential for postsecondary education, my particular disposition is well-suited for the role. From my work in low socio-economic public schools to privileged, high performing international schools, I have brought to my counseling role the same level of conscious attention and care to my students. In fact, before trendy words like grit, growth mindset, and mindfulness became commonplace in schools, I was already teaching these qualities through my work as a counselor. Thus, when the idea of mindfulness in schools began to surge over the last decade or so, this convergence of my personal and professional worlds propelled me to actively participate in this global enterprise.

It has been a privilege to witness this mindfulness wave that has steadily captivated the world by virtue of its healing properties. Over the last several decades, mindfulness has evolved from a traditional Buddhist philosophy to a secular conception embraced by a host of government authorities and private organizations. The idea of availing oneself to bare attention and moment to moment awareness is a seemingly accessible phenomenon that can be experienced by anyone of sound mind and body. As philosophized by German-born, Sri-Lanka-ordained Theravada monk, Nyanaponika Thera (1962: 7):

'This ancient Way of Mindfulness is as practicable today as it was 2,500 years ago. It is as applicable in the lands of the West as in the East; in the midst of life's turmoil as well as in the peace of the monk's cell.'

The applicability of mindfulness as a practice with such universal appeal lends itself well to schools, where student well-being is often at the forefront of most organizations' driving mission.

1.2.2 Exploring mindfulness in the context of education

The integration of this centuries-old Buddhist meditation method into the vernacular of schools seems like a breakthrough in well-being education. Some have contended that, beyond a transitory fad, the *mindfulness movement* is here to stay. Mindfulness practice has been linked to decreased stress levels, increased resilience, and improved teaching. In an issue of *IB World* (2016: 11), a publication devoted to IB World Schools that deliver the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, they investigate how mindfulness helps both students and teachers. The special feature highlights links between mindfulness and stress, social emotional learning, and Personal, Social Health Education (PSHE). This link to well-being is an essential component to the IB - "it is reflected in the IB Learner Profile attribute 'balanced', which encourages learners to understand the importance of calibrating all aspects of their lives to achieve wellbeing" (IB World, 2016:11).

The importance of well-being in schools and moreover, the idea of seeking balance to nurture the social-emotional state of students is not a newfound revelation. Based on numerous student accounts from a host of schools in the U.S., Thompson's (2004: 7) exposition of the school experience is delivered through a therapeutic lens:

*'I came to the conclusion that **even the very best school is a difficult place for a child**…While this may not seem like an earthshaking observation, I found it helpful. Working with teachers and administrators, we operate everyday on the implicit assumption that we have created a safe, healthy, and supportive environment for students, and that if the students struggle, it is due to factors inside **them**. However, students convey to me that even if school is a supportive environment, it is all too often a barrier to their own growth, development, and sense of self.'*

The rising pressure and competitive atmosphere in schools where sub-standard results could equate to an unsuccessful life are genuine student concerns. Some of this sentiment is based on firsthand observation but has also been noted globally, such as in Ripley's (2013: 57) student observations of South Korea where "school never stopped."

This shared sense of urgency to achieve in a highly competitive world that is characterized by increased uncertainty is why this research is both timely and humbling. Generations of young people are being influenced by a fast-paced technological era that has unleashed access to countless choices, opportunities, and atrocities. The ease and freedom to travel the world on phones and other digital devices has given rise to unprecedented addictions and has created an insatiable appetite for more. The fact that mindfulness practice has made its way into schools is testament to the mental health concerns that students and schools now have (Brown and Carr 2019).

My interest in taking part in this movement to slow down amidst this unstoppable technological trajectory is two-fold. Professionally, I am interested in exploring the extent to which mindfulness practice can serve as a conduit to student learning. The focus on obtaining firsthand perspectives from student voices is a methodological choice that will allow for in depth study that a phenomenon like mindfulness warrants. From a personal standpoint, I am distinctly interested in learning whether any variance exists between students who practice mindfulness in a Western international school setting versus those in a Southeast Asian national school setting.

1.3 A snapshot of mindfulness in schools from the East and West

The choice to employ a research study in these two disparate settings is a deliberate one. The idea of international education is one that has been the focus of thoughtful discourse

amongst academics and practitioners for years and remains unresolved. While a shared definition of international education remains elusive, the discussion has focused on ideals of academic excellence and global citizenship; indeed, "international education as a concept is inclusive, with many interpretations within different contexts" (Hayden 2006: 7). In comparison, national systems of education are confined to established regulations prescribed by governmental authorities. Still, "while national values are imparted to students, they should be encouraged to adopt an international perspective" (Aktas and Guven 2015: 100).

Amid broader national and international discussions on education, the growing curiosity about the impact of mindfulness in schools has provided increasing evidence of several interrelated benefits for all who choose to tap into this human capacity (Rocco 2012; Kabat-Zinn 2003). Therefore, this inquiry is informed by research demonstrating the following (Nhat Hanh 2017, Hyland 2016, Schoeberlein 2009):

Mindfulness practice enhances well-being.
Well-being impacts learning.
Mindfulness practice has the potential to enrich the learning experience.

Undoubtedly, given the nature of mindfulness and the unique insight that results from long-term practice (Bodhi 2016, Brazier 2016, Brown 2016), this research requires tremendous sensitivity to the individual experience. The added dimension of working with students also leads to further complexity when considering a multitude of both internal and external variables. In an effort to obtain in-depth qualitative data, rich with individual perspectives about the experience of mindfulness and learning, this research places the student voice at the heart of the study.

This research study endeavors to combine both professional and personal interests around the topic of mindfulness. Furthermore, this study comes at a most opportune time given increased uncertainty and the complex range of pressures our adolescents face. By aiming for depth of study, I hope to fill the lacunae in the current research in regard to individual student perceptions of mindfulness and learning. Since mindfulness is often understood to be a universal experience (Nhat Hanh 2017, Kabat-Zinn 2003), researching this

phenomenon in two different contexts will provide a unique opportunity to elucidate whether students, regardless of background or belief system, will attest to this claim.

1.4 Context, student samples, and school profiles

This qualitative, in-depth study consisted of a sample of high school students from Amsterdam and Bangkok. In order to capture the essence of mindfulness practice and its impact on learning, this small-scale design focused on the practice of reflective journaling and the student experience of learning. The student sample size began at 20, with ten from each school. Communications with both schools began in late summer of 2017 to assure sufficient notice for administrative staff, faculty, parents and students.

In an effort to demonstrate whether a distinct connection exists between mindfulness and learning, the original design included a test group in each school comprised of students interested in partaking in formalized mindfulness practice. An additional five students at each school were recruited to serve as a reference group. The initial selection of students required support from school staff in order to gauge student interest in participating in a long-term research study. At both schools, permission was obtained to work with students along with the support of administrative staff and faculty in order to conduct research.

After conducting preliminary interviews with students in both countries, participants engaged in reflective journaling to record thoughts about learning over the course of one calendar year. Qualitative data acquired through these journal reflections, along with pre and post interview data, aim to identify any connection between mindfulness practice and learning - with student voices at the heart of the process. The choice to focus this study on secondary students (ages ranging from 14-16) was due to this particular stage in learning and development and attendant anxieties about achievement, competition and the future. However, the task of engaging in a reflective journal over a year's time was a lot to ask a young person, particularly during a stressful period of adolescence. As a result of attrition, the findings from this study are based on data collected from a sample of 17 students in total. Nonetheless, the small sample allowed for in-depth, comprehensive qualitative data from each individual.

The comparative aspect of data collection from two schools in different parts of the world adds an important dimension to the research on mindfulness. I chose to investigate student experience of mindfulness in Bangkok due to my interest in learning if aspects of religion played a cultural role in student perceptions. Given the cultural and religious backdrop of a Buddhist country, I was curious to see if such factors influenced student understanding or application of mindfulness. The secondary school group in Amsterdam represents perspectives from a Western institutional standpoint. One of the driving factors behind exploring the connection between mindfulness and learning from both schools was whether this widespread, international movement on mindfulness also illustrates an example of cultural appropriation, whereby one culture adopts or applies aspects from another culture. This concept will be touched upon in the literature review; whether or not mindfulness is an example of this phenomenon has yet to be determined.

Although grade level terminology differed between the two countries, students from both schools were of secondary high school age. It is important to note that since this study progressed over the course of a calendar year, students advanced from one grade to the next. For instance, the students in Amsterdam who began as 9th graders were promoted into 10th and 10th graders progressed to 11th grade. The secondary school groups in Bangkok, classified as 'Matthayom,' were similarly promoted from one level to the next over the course of their summer hiatus in April. Students in both schools were 14-16 years of age.

While the age will be comparable in the two schools, the type of school in each country is noteworthy. The school in Amsterdam is an independent, international school that offers the globally recognized International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP), and fairly representative of a Western educational institution. The school in Bangkok is a government funded all-girls' school under the royal patronage of Her Majesty the Queen of Thailand. The structural composition and type of school may be dissimilar, but the focal point of the research is each institution's keen interest in mindfulness in schools. This common denominator was a key consideration during the preliminary planning phase of determining the schools that would be well suited for my research aims.

The international school in Amsterdam has nearly 1,400 students from nursery to grade 12. As of 2017, when the planning for research commenced, the high school had

approximately 384 students enrolled in grades 9-12. Students come from diverse cultural backgrounds with many fluent in more than two languages. The profile breakdown of high school students is roughly 20% North American, 57% European, 6% Japanese and 17% from other countries.

The government funded, or public all girls' school in Bangkok is considered a selective school, requiring strong academic achievement for admission. As is the case with most public schools in Thailand, this institution is adjacent to a Buddhist temple that bears a similar name. Under the Royal Patronage of Her Majesty the Queen of Thailand, this all girls' school is highly regarded in the eyes of the general Thai public. In contrast to the Western educational landscape where fee-paying private schools might be considered more elite compared to state or government funded public schools, this perception is not necessarily the case in Asia. In Thailand, admission into public schools is competitive, thereby more difficult, to obtain. It is commonly understood that families with the financial means can afford to send their children to private schools.

In regard to my research plans, there were several contrasting variables about the makeup of the two schools. The fact that one is an international school and one is a public, national school consequently leads to differences in academic programming and student body. I was cognizant that in generating student samples, I would potentially have one group with mixed genders and ethnicities and one constituting all girls of Thai ethnicity. However, the compelling and constant variable in my consideration of these two schools was their shared vision about mindfulness in schools.

In their mission statements, both schools emphasized the equal importance of good academics and good citizenship, with the acknowledgement that proper education engages both these aspects. In working towards this mission of holistic education, both schools equally embraced the idea of mindfulness in schools - the notion of mindfulness had already been researched and established as a bona fide program to incorporate into school programming. The plan to begin preliminary interviews in December 2017 was suitable timing since both schools intended to introduce research-based mindfulness programs to students in the spring of 2018.

1.5 Research Questions

By embarking on this cross-cultural study on the effects of mindfulness on student learning, I am eager to discover rich revelations from student experience. The impact of mindfulness therefore, unfolds in the *experience* of learning. There is a significant gap in the literature concerning the direct student experience of mindfulness, particularly at the secondary level. This privileged journey of following students in two different countries enabled me to explore the following research questions:

1) How do cultural constructs of the mind influence the experience of mindfulness and learning?
2) To what extent can mindfulness practice influence student experience of learning?
3) How does students' experience of mindfulness encourage ownership of learning?
4) How adept are young people at discerning any connections between attention and learning?
5) How does religion influence student perception of mindfulness practice?

Due to the cross-cultural dimension of this study, the data were highly nuanced according to the individual, culture, family background and pedagogy. There were also variables outside of my control that surfaced over the course of the research study such as the generating of student sample groups and changes in school programming. In Chapter 4, I explain some modifications to the research design due to unforeseeable complications in working with two different schools. As students continued to progress through their academic programs, the focal point remained on their individual perceptions of learning. Given the similar age group coupled with the principal variable of mindfulness practice in the test groups, this qualitatively rich research will hopefully make a significant contribution to the budding field of mindfulness research in schools.

Chapter 2: Literature Review – the expanse of mindfulness across history, cultures and classrooms

2.1 Overview of the chapter

The literature review draws connections between the phenomenon of mindfulness, its evolution from Buddhist roots to Western society, and present-day application within the educational context. It explores the trajectory of mindfulness, capturing discourse around its definition, experience and purpose in four sections. The chapter begins with an overview of established definitions of mindfulness by Buddhist scholars such as Dreyfus and Gethin, followed by a glimpse at how mindfulness has traversed cultural frontiers and has become a household term within numerous contexts. As such, the literature journeys back to the historical origins of mindfulness within the Buddhist context in order to engage with the spirit of the phenomenon as explicated by Brahmapundit and Hyland. This is followed by how mindfulness has made its way into spheres of medicine, neuroscience and psychology, evolving into a more secular concept for Western consumption.

The next section focuses on the experience of learning, acknowledging the work of Vygotsky, Dewey, Bandura and others, to unpack the phenomenon of knowledge attainment. The role of attention, learner perception, and learner attributes are explored to demonstrate the complex nature of learning. A number of scholarly works is referenced, illustrating the impact of both external and internal factors on learning outcomes.

The subsequent section merges mindfulness and learning. The surge in evidence-based data on the merits of mindfulness practice, along with its impact on the brain and attention, become natural gateways for its introduction in schools. Within the framework of wellness and positive psychology, mindfulness practice in schools finds backing from scholars and classroom practitioners alike. In recognizing such initiatives in schools, it is equally notable how mindfulness, criticized for its cursory and possibly inaccurate application within schools, could potentially be an example of cross-cultural policy borrowing.

Finally, the chapter ends with the current research study's contribution to literature. Framed by insights from the West and East, the review of literature closes with the current opportunity to engage directly with students and their lived experiences. The phenomenological approach to research is aimed at capturing the insights and reflections of students from two different cultural contexts.

2.2 What is mindfulness?

Simply stated, mindfulness is described as compassionate, non-judgmental moment-to-moment awareness (Nhat Hanh 2015, Williams and Penman 2011, Kabat-Zinn 2005, Thera 1962). It is observed as the state of being fully anchored in the present. As Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (2015: 55) states, "mindfulness means reclaiming attention." It is the art of nonthinking, of cultivating stillness and calming the clamor of thoughts that consume one's mind. While ostensibly an uncomplicated description, the phenomenon of mindfulness is incredibly complex. Some Buddhist scholars would argue that such perfunctory definitions derived in the West have neglected to include fundamental tenets of mindfulness grounded in the Buddhist tradition from which it stems (Dreyfus 2011).

In an effort to explicate the various definitions of mindfulness that have evolved over millennia and in recent decades as the concept gained momentum in the West, Gethin (2011) considers historical Buddhist texts along with modern day evidence-based interpretations to demonstrate how the definition of mindfulness correlate closely with both understanding and application. He argues that aspects of mindfulness from the Theravāda Buddhist tradition are not explicit in the Western context of *Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction* (MBSR) and *Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy* (MBCT) programs. Scholarly interpretations of mindfulness include 'recollection,' 'active state of mind,' 'attentiveness,' 'reflection,' or 'steady perception' (Gethin 2011). The fact that the word *sati* has been etymologically translated as 'memory' seems to contradict direct definitions of *sati* as mindfulness, or present-centered awareness (Dreyfus 2011: 45, Gethin 2011: 264).

Dreyfus (2011: 41-42) argues that cursory definitions of mindfulness that have been applied in psychology and employed in therapeutic interventions are particularly suspect when coupled with the rhetoric of authenticity. Buddhism as a plural tradition, is imbued with history and cultural permutations. At the core of Buddhist thought, meditation

practice is the vehicle by which one may experience *sati*, the "calling to mind (of) wholesome and unwholesome qualities" such that one may consciously "root out greed, hatred and delusion" (Gethin 2011: 269-270). From the ancient Pali script, *sati* is said to comprise of four foundations (*satipatthana*) to cultivate insight (*vipassana*) and calm (*samatha*) such that as the individual commences meditation practice as developed by the Buddha, one is to "calmly observe and note various qualities of the body (*kaya*), feelings (*vedana*), mind-states (*citta*) and reality-patterns (*dhamma*)" (Brahmapundit 2017: 359).

In 1881, early translations of *sati* to the English word 'mindfulness,' by British scholar T.W. Rhys Davids served as a springboard for subsequent scrutiny of the term, referencing "activity of mind and constant presence of mind which is one of the duties most frequently inculcated on the good Buddhist" (Rhys Davids, cited in Gethin 2011). Further analysis of the experience of mindfulness have led to more developed translations to include the aspect of impermanence in human experience (Rhys Davids 1910: 322):

'Etymologically Sati is Memory. But as happened at the rise of Buddhism to so many other expressions in common use, a new connotation was then attached to the word, a connotation that gave a new meaning to it, and renders 'memory' a most inadequate and misleading translation. It became the memory, recollection, calling-to-mind, being-aware-of, certain specified facts. Of these the most important was the impermanence (the coming to be as the result of a cause, and the passing away again) of all phenomena, bodily and mental. And it included the repeated application of this awareness, to each experience of life, from the ethical point of view.'

By means of practice and keen observation, the meditator becomes increasingly aware of the ebb and flow of thought, presence of mind or lack thereof, thereby witnessing firsthand the observable phenomenon of impermanence. Suffice it to say, the elements of semantics, concept formation and application of meaning are all at play in undertaking the characterization of mindfulness. Interpretations of Buddhist manuscripts and evolving translations of scripture from ancient Sanskrit are the basis for current discourses, when applying a concept from ancient religious tradition to modern day psychology. Not only is there no singular Buddhist view of mindfulness and no direct translation from ancient script, but the word *mindfulness* in itself is linguistically and semantically complex (Dreyfus 2011, Hanley et al., 2016, Hyland 2016). Given the breadth of meaning behind the notion of mindfulness, the transference from theory to practice leads to an array of adaptations.

In discussing the operationalization of mindfulness, Hanley et al. (2016: 105) state "…the diversity of mindfulness practices gives rise to another area of conceptual confusion." When a concept is inherently flexible and open to interpretation, it naturally follows that its application will manifest in many forms. Dreyfus (2011: 49-50) emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the cognitive nature of mindfulness such that the phenomenology of attention coupled with clear comprehension of one's mental states allow for deeper insight into the impermanence of thought, a facet that is aligned with the Buddhist tradition. As Gethin (2011: 273) explains:

'That watching the body as body with mindfulness should involve overcoming one's longing for and discontent with the world might suggest that mindfulness is envisaged as something rather more sustained and developed than mere bare attention or present moment non-judgmental observation; it suggests that a prerequisite for true mindfulness is watching from the vantage point of a relatively still and peaceful state of mind.'

Hence, there is no universally acknowledged definition of mindfulness. There are working definitions that support different kinds of practices. The idea that mindfulness practice has been tailored for secular use, a potential cultural appropriation of sorts, whereby essential elements have been extracted for ease of acceptance and understanding in Western cultures, leads one to question whether the ends justify the means.

In Buddhism, the practice of meditation serves as a foundation for mindfulness that can eventually give rise to powerful states of mind imbued with loving kindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity (Brahmapundit 2017: 358). In acknowledging the recent surge of interest in mindfulness, Brahmapundit (2017: 360) notes that the spheres of science and medicine have focused primarily on the nonjudgmental awareness of present experience and thought, and that, "the eight-week courses in secular mindfulness have been criticized for not going very deep." Consequently, it can be argued that a secular adaption of mindfulness may give rise to lacunae in a practitioner's training. The distinction between short-term secular mindfulness study and long-term practice as a way of life is worth exploring in the context of mindfulness practice in schools.

2.2.1 The mindfulness movement

The variance in our understanding of mindfulness, or even more, the *mind* from both Western and Eastern perspectives have unquestionable influence on its delivery and practice. There is confounding evidence in the literature that proffers a wealth of benefits from mindfulness practice from different schools of thought. The Mindfulness in Schools Project dissociates mindfulness from breathing exercises, yoga, and religion (MiSP 2017) and yet much of their curriculum incorporates conscious breathing practices. In fact, it has been argued that this era of McMindfulness represents the oversimplification of a highly complex phenomenon. Hyland (2016: 110) notes:

'The principal weakness of the commodification of mindfulness strategies is that – by divorcing technique from underpinning value foundations – they militate against the achievement of the key objectives which account for their widespread appeal in the first place: the development of open-hearted awareness and emotional stability, the fostering of positive social values linked to self-compassion and empathy, and the enhancement of mind/body well-being in general.'

Thus, it appears that mindfulness has come to a crossroads in how it is interpreted and practiced. Mindfulness is an experience that is universal and human. It has existed for centuries, crossed cultural boundaries, and will likely persist. But the incongruence in perception deserves attention, especially given the widespread introduction in schools (Weare and Huppert 2018). The inception of mindfulness programs in schools is largely due to its endorsement by institutions of health and government mandates supporting the evidence-based research of improved mental health and accompanying educational benefits (Weare and Huppert 2018, MiSP 2017, Hyland 2016).

Kabat-Zinn, who first introduced mindfulness practice within a clinical setting, argues that the universality of mindfulness is an experience that has been realized in an array of cultural and historical manifestations and acknowledges the possible allusion to mindfulness in Emily Dickinson's poem, "Me from Myself - to Banish -" (Selected Poems and Readings for Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction in Mind-Body Medicine 2015):

> *Me from Myself – to banish–*
> *Had I Art –*
> *Impregnable my Fortress*
> *Unto All Heart –*

But since Myself – assault Me –
How have I peace
Except by subjugating
Consciousness?

And since We're mutual Monarch
How this be
Except by Abdication –
Me – of Me?

Notwithstanding myriad interpretations of the literary work of Dickinson, scholars have noted unmistakable internal disjunction "when the self disjoins from itself," indicating a very human and onerous struggle to control one's mind (Barnstone 2007: 62). Arguably, the internal infrastructure of the mind and how to navigate the enigmatic pathways of thought have always been engrained in the human condition (Brahmapundit 2017, Kabat-Zinn 2005; 2003, Thera 1962).

The argument that mindfulness is central to human well-being clearly demonstrates how the phenomenon has become a commodified practice. Its meaning has shifted from a cultural and religious context to one of universal psychology, making mindfulness more accessible to a wider audience. However, we need to be skeptical about the motives for the embracing of mindfulness in the West. Given that the primary focus of education has been to prepare students for the world of work through repeated high stakes testing in neo-liberal societies such as the UK and USA, there is a question as to whether mindfulness is seen to improve well-being in a general sense or whether it is being adopted in what has been called a 'field-hospital' approach to help those who have experienced mental health problems due to such pressures. If the latter is the case then this reflects a troubling trend whereby schools are expected to employ practices that will enable their students to remain academically robust and competitive (Brown and Carr 2019).

The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is yet another example of a measuring stick designed to compare the global playing field but it has led to unintended consequences. The impact of policy borrowing and how mindfulness represents this similar kind of transference will be explored in section 2.4.1. Amidst the influence of globalization and international competition and comparison, the pressure for schools – and thereby, students – to perform becomes a tacit call to action. It is this performative culture that has led to a discernable focus on the school setting as the

nucleus for identifying and supporting the mental health of young people in the name of favorable academic performance (Brown and Carr 2019: 243).

While politically, economically, and educationally nuanced and debated, the mindfulness movement is unmistakable. As its popularity continues to grow, it is worth noting how contested the very definition of mindfulness has been, before ever entering the educational context.

Sharf (2015: 472) describes the evolution of mindfulness practice through the challenge of determining a shared definition and notes the rise of "Buddhist modernism," an approach to Buddhist philosophy and understanding of mindfulness resulting from intellectual discourse spanning some 150 years. This complex exchange between Asia and the West has led to scholarly scrutiny over the rhetoric of mindfulness, its roots in Buddhist practice, and its secular application by laypeople. It was not until the late 20th century when Burmese monk Mahāsī Sayādaw (1904-1982) developed the method in which "the practitioner is trained to focus in whatever sensory object arises in the moment-to-moment flow of consciousness" (Sharf 2015: 473). This practice was designed for the common layperson and is well established today as a foundational meditation technique. Sharf (2015: 473) notes that it is Mahāsī's approach to mindfulness - understood as 'bare attention' and 'living in the here and now,' that is rooted in Buddhist modernism - that spans geographical, cultural, sectarian, and social boundaries.

The idea of mindfulness as bare attention has also been a subject of criticism since it views the mind as a blank slate, a *tabula rasa*, void of perception or conscious recognition (Sharf 2015). The purpose of meditation practice, in Theravada Buddhism, is to tap into one's inner wisdom by observing the nature of the mind in all its negative tendencies and bright potential (Brahmapundit 2017: 350). Mahāsī's technique was criticized for its oversimplification of mindfulness practice along with his claim that stages of enlightenment could be achieved in a short period of time. The techniques of the Chinese Zen tradition focused more on direct approaches of viewing the mind in the here-and-now, unencumbered by practice in monastic renunciation or Buddhist doctrine (Sharf 2015: 475). Ultimately, both traditions continued to be scrutinized for its oversimplification of a complex practice and even more, "the early Zen and Dzogchen teachers found themselves in the same position as Mahāsī: castigated for dumbing down the tradition, for devaluing ethical training, for misconstruing or devaluing the role of

wisdom, and for their crassly 'instrumental' approach to practice" (Sharf 2015: 476). The depth of our consciousness and vast ability for the mind to emote, regulate, and wander adds to the complexity of a shared definition.

The distinctions between East Asian and Southeast Asian Buddhist practices, claims, and controversies remind the modern practitioner to pay heed to these traditions. It is a humbling reminder that mindfulness, while seemingly uncomplicated at first, is in fact an exceedingly complex phenomenon to understand and educate. As Bodhi (2011: 20) affirms, while the practice of mindfulness may appear an innovative form of treatment since its induction in clinical settings, its origins date back to the teachings of the Buddha, "called the Dhamma (Sanskrit Dharma), not as a set of doctrines demanding belief but as a body of principles and practices that sustain human beings in their quest for happiness and spiritual freedom. At its heart lies a system of training that leads to insight and the overcoming of suffering." In order to understand its depth of meaning and capture a fuller appreciation of the essence of mindfulness, it is important to return to the wellspring, based in Buddhist philosophy and practice.

2.2.2 Buddhism - religion, tradition, and way of life

In its historical context, Buddhism has been in existence for over 2,500 years originating from India with Siddhattha Gotama, a brilliant thinker and philosopher whose journey to understand human suffering led to a spiritual "awakening" in which he came to understand the true nature of things (Brahmapundit 2017). Much of the literature on Buddhism has been translated for the Western reader and while rendered interpretations can adequately connote the spirit of meaning, the difficulty lies in stringing a series of translated concepts to achieve the same overall understanding. The word 'Buddhism' was a derived English term to describe the religion characterized by "a devotion to 'the Buddha,' 'Buddhas' or 'Buddhahood'" (Brahmapundit 2017: 3). But unlike some other religious beliefs, Buddhism does not imply deference to a singular holy being. As explicated by Brahmapundit (2017: 3):

'Buddha' is not a proper name, but a descriptive title meaning 'Awakened One' or 'Enlightened One'. This implies that most people are seen, in a spiritual sense, as being asleep - unaware of how things really are. The person known as 'the Buddha' refers to the Buddha known to history, Gotama. From its earliest times, though, Buddhism has referred to other Buddhas who have lived on earth in distant

past ages, or who will do so in the future…The emphasis in Buddhism is on the ***teachings*** *of the Buddha(s), and the 'awakening' or 'enlightenment' that these are seen to lead to.'*

Considering this historical basis, anyone has the potential to become a Buddha. The reason it is not a more common occurrence is because the pathway to enlightenment is an especially arduous one. For this reason, Buddhist laypeople pay respect towards devout Buddhist monks and nuns — individuals who have dedicated their lives to the teachings and practice of righteous thought, speech, and action through present awareness. In effect, the Buddha ('enlightened one'), Dhamma ('teachings of the Buddha'), and the Sangha ('monastic community') neatly constitute the Triple Gem whereby practicing Buddhists pay homage and respect (Brahmapundit 2017). Although it is universally understood that enlightenment is not easily attained, practicing Buddhists share the belief that attainment is the ultimate goal, which consequently influences the manner in which they lead their lives.

The Buddha's search for truth about the human condition resulted in his enlightenment about suffering and the end of suffering (Hyland 2016: 101). The extraction of mindfulness from Buddhist philosophy has been cause for much debate and controversy. By removing spirituality from the phenomenon, mindfulness has developed into a more secular and thereby, legitimized form of practice. As noted by Weare and Huppert (2019: 5):

'In the western mainstream the cultivation of mindfulness has generally moved from its philosophical and religious roots in the East into the more secular and scientific perspectives of the West. The term, if not the accurate understanding of it, has entered popular consciousness and the growth is nothing short of explosive…'

It is through this removal of the religious that has allowed mindfulness to enter mainstream consciousness and eventually, the school setting.

2.2.3 Mindfulness in the West

Given the advent of mindfulness in the medical field in the late-1970s through Kabat-Zinn's scientific and evidenced based *Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction* (MBSR) program originating from University of Massachusetts Medical Center (Rocco 2012: 3) followed by the practice of *Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy* (MBCT) developed by Williams,

Teasdale, and Segal (Williams and Penman 2011: 3), it seems that in order for mindfulness to be palatable to the general population, there needed to be a distinct detachment from its Buddhist roots. While most academic literature will credit Buddhism for its longstanding traditions founded on mindfulness, an explanation of how the practice is a universal phenomenon and can be considered secular, inevitably follows. For instance, early criticisms of mindfulness practice centered around its connections to the East and religious belief; only after several decades, and countless clinical trials and interventions, did the general public draw enough compelling evidence that mindfulness could benefit not only the healthcare field but society at large (Rocco 2012: 3).

Once it was established that mindfulness was in fact, of therapeutic benefit in the clinical context (Kabat-Zinn 2003: 145), burgeoning interest in its application in other arenas began to gradually take hold. From vast organizations to individual curiosity, the idea that mindfulness promises enhanced well-being and happiness seems a worthwhile ideal to pursue. In referencing their research on anxiety, stress and depression and how mindfulness could serve as an antidote to such afflictions, Williams and Penman (2011: 2) claim:

'This work has discovered the secret to sustained happiness and how you can successfully tackle anxiety, stress, exhaustion and even full-blown depression…It's a secret that was well understood in the ancient world and is kept alive in some cultures even today. But many of us in the Western world have largely forgotten how to live a good and joyful existence.'

The revelation here is unmistakable. It is as if the contemporary world has been confronted with a monumental paradox - in order to cope with the pell-mell pace of our lives we need to refrain from heedless attempts to keep up, but rather be still and slow down.

Tolle (2018) contends that it is this complete identification with one's stream of thinking that comprises the general human affliction. This "powerful pull of your mind" and constant need to attend to one's thoughts can lead to a false sense of self. Referencing the teachings of the Buddha, Tolle (2018) calls to mind the dangers of falling prey to this overly absorbed ego; the fact that "there is no self," leads to the insight into the impermanence of all conditions including our thoughts and perceptions. He offers that when one achieves this basic awareness and appreciation for the present moment, there

are enlightening opportunities to delve further into the vertical dimension of the present, through meditation practice.

These fundamental tenets of mindfulness speak to its universality and applicability in a range of disciplines. In a review of literature on mindfulness in workplace settings, Worawichayavongsa et al. (2017) argue that mindfulness has significant value in the modern day workplace that is rife with increased competition and dynamism. While still a nascent area of research, they cite growing evidence that mindfulness practice can support individuals to navigate challenging work environments and thrive through the development of "success-conducive competencies" such as critical thinking, collaboration, and resilience, among others (2017: 348). Similarly, within the organizational context of schools, Kuyken et al. (2013) glean positive findings on the efficacy and acceptance of mindfulness practice among adolescents. Results from the non-randomized controlled feasibility trial of the Mindfulness in Schools Program curriculum demonstrate "clear evidence of its acceptability, evidence of its impact on depressive symptoms and promising evidence of its efficacy in reducing stress and enhancing well-being" (Kuyken et al. 2013: 129).

The notion that regular mindfulness practice can lead to stress reduction is the crux of the *Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction* (MBSR) that Kabat-Zinn has described as once "radical in 1979, is now axiomatic throughout medicine…its use and value are supported by increasingly strong scientific evidence of its efficacy" (2013: xlviii). The process of extracting mindfulness from its Buddhist origins, however necessary to promote secular practice, leads to the question of authenticity of experience. Kabat-Zinn (2003: 147) asserts that "the challenge is to find a fit that honors the integrity of what may be different but complementary epistemologies." Yet, the epistemology of Buddhism, or the philosophy behind this long-established belief system is essentially a body of knowledge that is exceedingly complex in both breadth and depth. Mindfulness is an essential component, but merely one aspect within a nexus of beliefs about human awareness and understanding. When there is exclusive focus on the notion of mindfulness alone, removed from other interconnected aspects related to the phenomenon of practice, the question remains whether an individual is able to experience depth of attainment and long-term positive impact.

2.2.4 Neuroscience and the impact of mindfulness on the brain

Along with emerging evidence that mindfulness meditation may give rise to increased clarity, equanimity and attentional skills (Nhat Hanh and Weare 2017) the research gleaned from neuroscience has contributed significantly to overall acceptance of mindfulness as a promising practice to implement in schools. The capacity for mindfulness practice to positively restructure mental states and cognitive functioning, availing young minds to learning and increased self-awareness make mindfulness-based interventions an appealing initiative in schools (Nhat Hanh and Weare 2017, Zenner et al. 2014, Mapel 2012). Neuroplasticity, described as "brain changes that occur in response to experience," (Davidson and Lutz 2008) is a fundamental feature of our biological makeup. This changeable nature of the adolescent brain, combined with neuroimaging research that meditation can alter patterns of brain functioning (Davidson and Lutz 2008), lead to vast implications regarding the position of schools in developing the well-being and academic achievement of students.

Within the sub-field of positive psychology, mindfulness meditation has been reported to produce beneficial effects on both psychosomatic and overall mental health while potentially decreasing unpleasant emotions like anxiety or fear (Hölzel et al. 2016). The effects of positive emotion on the brain have resulting impact on perception and cognition and, as Melo and Anderson (2016: 211) state:

'Specifically, this suggests that the increased cognitive flexibility and creative thinking associated with positive mood may reflect a fundamental change in information processing, namely to broaden the scope of selective attention.'

The concomitant notions of mindfulness practice and positive emotion and their impact on neuroplasticity and attention are therefore, worth considering within the framework of providing holistic instruction in schools.
In fact, as Young (2018) attests, this connection between science and mindfulness meditation becomes evident through regular practice whereby the "meditator acquires certain three skills: concentration powers, clarity and equanimity." Noting that these attainments are all attentional skills, Young further claims that learning improves when these contemplative skills are honed. Given the increased credibility to effects of mindfulness practice, he states that the "historical Buddha can be deemed a protoscientist"

and poses whether "the spirit of science [can] be made relevant to spirituality" (Young 2018).

2.2.5 Mindful mess? Limitations and criticisms

The fact that mindfulness has gained such prolific influence over recent years has stirred criticism and unease from scholars and Buddhist practitioners. Bodhi's (2016: 3) reflections on his thirty-plus year experience begins with an appreciation of:

'…the fourfold application of mindfulness to the contemplation of body, feelings, states of mind, and mental phenomena.'

Despite the tributaries that formed throughout the expansion of Buddhism in Asia, the principal source of these branches of thought derived from the same roots - a devotion to the Buddha and his teachings, its spiritual essence. Bodhi depicts the Western adaptation of mindfulness as follows:

'…a pressure cooker approach to meditation was the most effective way to rescue those whose minds were being buffeted by a consumerist culture driven by nothing higher than the pursuit of money and power.'

Through Bodhi's experience, he describes how Western practitioners severed the connections between insight meditation and Buddhist spirituality. Such transformations "significantly altered the practice of mindfulness by reframing it in psychological terms, eventually undergoing a major overhaul with regard to its objectives and goals" (Purser et. al. 2016: xii).

Essentially, mindfulness may not necessarily be the panacea that some posit in order to incorporate its practice into academic and work settings. The capacity for focused attention to improve one's experience of learning seems a logical benefit. However, traditional practitioners and Buddhist scholars argue that short-term practice is insufficient in cultivating the wider goals of mindfulness, namely: moral qualities of compassion and equanimity; deeper dimensions of spirituality that combines both awareness of the present moment as well as a gentle appreciation for the human condition (Hyland 2016: 102-103). McCaw (2019) distinguishes between the types of mindfulness practice employed, labelling them 'thin' and 'thick' to demonstrate the relationship between conceptual understanding and practice. He argues that there are complex

consequences to the application of 'thin' mindfulness, a truncated version that has allowed for wider acceptance in the contemporary context.

This abridgment of the mindfulness phenomenon, whether intentional or otherwise, seemed a necessary transition in order for the concept to make its way into modern day culture and vernacular. Purser (2019: 12-13) asserts that mindfulness has been commodified as a capitalist venture, reduced to a product touted by celebrities and the self-help industry. Mindfulness is reported (Purser 2019) to be a $4 billion industry and publications that include the word 'mindful' are aplenty, in multiple languages and for all ages, all marketing the same promise of healing through breathing. While distilling mindfulness from its roots may suit economic purposes, when it comes to practice in schools, it is worth exploring how different interpretations of the phenomenon impact students.

Brown's (2016) critical review of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) reveals certain patterns that include "stealth Buddhism" and "unintentional indoctrination" due to the spiritual effects of mindfulness. She claims that you can't have it both ways, secular and religious, and it is incumbent upon educators to scrutinize ethical and legal considerations when employing mind-body practices in schools. Brown (2016: 90) summarizes the Western adaptation of "carefully camouflaged Buddhist content" through patterns of skillful speech and scripting and argues:

'Mindfulness is steeped in transcendent beliefs and enacted through practices that purportedly connect individuals with ultimate reality, trace a path to salvation from suffering, and cultivate spiritual awareness and virtues…ultimate ideas, metaphysical beliefs, a comprehensive worldview, and external signs of religion and spirituality can all be identified…whether or not mindfulness can be separated from religion, in today's cultural milieu secular and religious mindfulness seem conjoined twins.'

Thus, reducing religion to rhetoric and a scripting may serve a purpose in contemporary Western practice. However, the experiential benefits of the phenomena give rise to overlapping beliefs which are difficult to unravel. Furthermore, the separation of church and state comes to bear when considering the application of mindfulness practice in schools. The reality is that mindfulness practice is now a commonplace activity in schools, and in some parts of the world, a mandated initiative to support student learning.

2.3 The experience of learning

Through an analysis of thought and understanding, Biesta (2016) reflects on the theories of Arendt and suggests that education involves a certain "'quality' that is not simply the result of engagement in learning" (2016: 184). Biesta shares the insights of academic scholar, Tamboukou, in that "Arendt is warning against a conception (and practice) of education that simply focuses on the transmission of knowledge from teacher to students, without providing students with opportunities for 'grasping' the world, that is, come to an understanding of it" (Biesta 2016: 184).

The foundation of understanding and what we come to know as cogent truth through the transference of thoughts and senses is an ineffable experience. When a student is receptive to the delivery of instruction and the interpretation of knowledge, deep resonance transpires. The mind is activated and engaged in learning. Synapses fire as the brain experiences the electricity of acquiring new information. The experience of learning is an expansion of the mind, quite literally.

Based on the work of Vygotsky (1986: 107), the experience of learning is a phenomenon that requires an association of thoughts and words:

'We may say, therefore, that neither the growth of the number of associations, nor the strengthening of attention, nor the accumulation of images and representations, nor determining tendencies-that none of these processes, however advanced they might be, can lead to concept formation. Real concepts are impossible without words, and thinking in concepts does not exist beyond verbal thinking. That is why the central moment in concept formation, and its generative cause, is a specific use of words as functional "tools."'

The capacity for a student to develop these mental formations reflects incredibly sophisticated faculties of the malleable brain. Vygotsky (1986: 166-170) further claims that as students continue to evolve and transition from more primitive to "higher mental processes of voluntary attention and logical memory" the ability to consciously attach meaning to thoughts and control attention becomes a deliberate and volitional action.

2.3.1 The role of attention in learning

The ability to attend is therefore, a critical requisite to learning. The evolution of attention is a process that takes time throughout a child's development, from the forming of progressive memory to applying sustained attention to the capacity for matured thinking. In order to learn, the student must have the ability to attend in order to absorb information. It is this crucial development of attention that "must complete certain cycles before instruction can begin" (Vygotsky 1986:175).

Vygotsky further claims (1986: 170) that "we use consciousness to denote awareness of the activity of the mind - the consciousness of being conscious." Lave and Wenger (1996: 143-148) expand on Vygotsky's research and extrapolate that learning should not be simplified as "a matter of transmission and assimilation" and contend that learners, as participants of their social world, acquire knowledge both directly and peripherally:

'We think it is important to consider how shared cultural systems of meaning and political economic structuring are interrelated, in general and as they help to co-constitute learning in communities of practice.'

Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that conventional theories of learning should not be limited to the classroom, but as Lave and Wenger (1996: 148) contend, sustained learning occurs as a perpetual phenomenon as participants formulate identity and meaning amidst the broader parameters of the social community. In essence, learning is ubiquitous and reflective; as long as individuals can perceive the sensory information that surrounds them, the process of reconstructing data into meaning is a continuously natural occurrence.

Recognizing that learning is constantly taking place, the question of how the experience of learning transpires and how it is orchestrated follows. Lewin (2014: 355) warns against the common assumption that students can directly regulate and control their own attention. The demand to *pay attention* is routine procedure in many classrooms whereby teachers command awareness from students prior to delivering instruction. This overly simplistic assumption, however, does not factor in the complex nature of attention; the challenges involved in capturing and sustaining it. Lewin (2014: 358) suggests, "there is something about attention that cannot be demanded, still less coerced…attention is

capable of involuntary wandering as much as voluntary control." He later attests that there is a strong relationship between attention and one's will.

When attention is lacking, the impact on learning can be catastrophic. Thompson's (2004: 144-45) research on schools and student learning conditions demonstrate that despite the best efforts of many institutions, when students are disengaged in their learning, the idea of school can be a harrowing experience:

'Some students become so discouraged in school that they can bear it no longer. Their psychological struggle with the rules, the demands, their peers, their anxiety, or academic failure - it all becomes intolerable… Many students who continue to attend classes physically have actually left on a psychological basis. They take their souls out of the endeavor.'

Disengagement is therefore, the antithesis of learning. Irrespective of the type of school or socio-economic background, there are students who thrive and succeed and those who flounder. In order for students to be receptive to knowledge and to remain engaged in schools (notwithstanding extraneous school and family conditions), they must take ownership of learning through focused attention.

The role of attention in learning is not that far removed from the idea of presence of mind associated with mindfulness. Considering the demands of school and adolescence - from mastering curriculum to establishing one's identity - to pay attention can prove to be a monumental challenge. Despite the challenges students may face in the maelstrom of adolescence, the importance of paying attention continues to serve as a pre-requisite to learning.

The question of *how* to pay attention is not so clear. Krishnamurti (1963: 13-14) claims:

'Learning in the true sense of the word is possible only in that state of attention, in which there is no outer or inner compulsion…It is attention that allows silence to come upon the mind, which is the opening of the door to creation…You can teach concentration, but attention cannot be taught…attention arises spontaneously when around the student there is an atmosphere of well-being.'

This state of attention, or ability to avail the mind to learn, is precisely one of the asserted benefits of mindfulness practice. In addition to improved well-being, there is evidence that

mindfulness has a positive impact on academic achievement, cognitive and performance skills (Nhat Hanh and Weare 2017, Zenner et al. 2014). By using the breath to anchor oneself in the present moment, this simple measure has the capacity to immediately immerse the individual into a state of focused attention.

Thus, the role of attention in learning is significant. As alluded to earlier, Lewin (2014: 362) also mentions the relationship between the will and attention and notes the difficulty involved in "suggesting that the will can directly command attention." According to Rieber and Robinson (2004: 376), as children mature, this organic process of developing attention gradually shifts through "the processes of cultural development of attention." Through an extensive account of experiments replicating situations requiring concentrated attention, Rieber and Robinson share detailed analyses from fields of psychology and education of the mechanisms of attention and the variance from pre-school aged children to young adulthood. They suggest (2004: 395-396):

'The word 'attention' in itself serves only to define the degree of clarity; the process itself of concentrating attention in thinking…From our point of view, the primary condition that forms attention is not inner "volitional" function, but the cultural, historically developed operation that leads to the appearance of voluntary attention.'

While this stance appears counter to Lewin's reference to the association between attention and the will, he adds that "the right kind of effort can be employed to create conditions in which attention can flower" (2014: 364).

Despite the complexities behind the meaning of attention, the assumption that greater attention and focus give rise to lucid understanding remain a desirable condition in educational settings. In another experiment that demonstrates the development of mediated attention at various age levels, Rieber and Robinson conclude that, as children matured, so did their mastery of attention and subsequently, the task at hand. Based on the use of a stimulus-device to measure the degree of internal attention, they learn that the decreasing number of errors corresponded to the development of mediated attention whereby, "the processes are mastered gradually and attention is subjected to the will" (2004: 378). From their extensive research, Rieber and Robinson sift through different kinds of attention in different types of activity and in their undertaking to perform

structured experimental studies, they posit that "attention cannot be observed in its pure form" (2004: 384).

2.3.2 Learner perception of attainment

How a learner then comprehends new material and eventually perceives mastery of information is the next question. While student perceptions of content mastery unveil an even broader field of inquiry, it is relevant to this study of how students perceive their learning as it relates to mindfulness practice. In Good's (1983) review of five position papers on the topic of student and teacher perceptions of learning, he summarizes the contributions these authors have made to the field, but maintains that the research remains inconclusive due to the variance in human experience. From the work of Frieze, Francis, and Hanusa, Good (1983:126-127) notes the highly subjective nature of individual definitions of success and how distinction should be made between "objective *information* that students possess about their performance and the *attributions* that students make about the causes of their performance."

The notion of circuitry between thought and the development of speech is precisely in line with Vygotsky's influential illustration of the Zone of Proximal Development (Rieber and Robinson 2004: 12). Essentially, Vygotsky describes the zone of proximal development as the interconnectedness between knowledge and understanding that takes place through the process of prompting or as Bruner explains, 'scaffolding,' whereby an instructor breaks down larger concepts into more manageable steps. In Bruner's (Rieber and Robinson 2004: 12) explanation of Vygotsky's view of development as a theory of education, he notes the zone of proximal development as "the role of dialogue as a precursor to inner speech…between a more expert teacher and a less expert learner. Once a concept is explicated in dialogue, the learner is enabled to reflect on the dialogue, to use its distinctions and connections to reformulate his own thought." This form of assisted learning is not uncommon in education but as Bruner further explains, the transition from thought to speech is an elaborate process that again, bears upon the learner's consciousness and volition.

The many intrinsic and extrinsic factors within the classroom environment indelibly contribute to learner perceptions. Social comparison, teacher attributions about their own performance in relation to student achievement, and teacher affect in the classroom all play

a role in how students view their academic success (Arens and Möller 2016, Cosmovici et al. 2009, Good 1983). In fact, it could be argued that most classrooms, regardless of cultural or socio-economic background, are evaluative by nature. Counter to previous belief that students were passive recipients of their teachers' evaluations of performance, the literature refers to the classroom environment as the ideal setting for students to actively engage in comparing peer performance; this "active process by which students obtain and use this information is social comparison" (Levine 1983: 29). Therefore, student perceptions of learning are inherently influenced by all these factors at play: built in reward systems, preconceived notions about teacher perceptions, and individual impressions of self and peers.

While the motivation to compare performance with others as a means to self-evaluate can be considered a behavioral adaptation (Levine 1983: 30), perceptions of student-teacher relations also contribute considerably to the student experience of learning. As observed by Arens and Möller (2016), German students' perceptions of their learning environment are highly influenced by their perceived student-teacher relationship and the quality of instruction. Similarly, within a Norwegian school context, Cosmovici et al. (2009) discover that students demonstrating average achievement tend to have higher perceptions of their learning environment compared to those with the highest and lowest grade levels. Previous studies (p. 381) that indicate Norwegian teachers directing instruction towards middle level achievement reveal that differentiation of instruction was not the norm; yet perceptions of the quality of student-teacher relations once again, had a noticeable impact on student perception of their learning environment.

While these are meaningful areas of research that add value to pedagogical practice, the gaps in the literature indicate that there are far too many factors involved that interfere with any conclusive deduction about the nature of learner perception. Some of the research shortfalls stem from lack of systematic observation around the specific context of classroom interactions (Good 1983: 136), but there again, such endeavors are difficult to execute with precision. Furthermore, direct observations from a researcher, while a conceivable undertaking, would still lead to third-party conclusion that may affect the validity of results. Thus, learner perception of attainment, while subjective and convoluted, remains a significant link between delivery of instruction and content mastery.

2.3.3 The effect of learner ownership

The idea of urging the will to learn can bring about student ownership of their learning. As Abbott and McTaggart (2010: 9) substantiate, there is a tremendous distinction between teaching and learning and the fact that many schools in the world continue to assume that learning occurs in the presence of teaching is an inaccurate claim. They emphasize the importance of experiential learning and state (2010: 10):

'It's simple, really: learning is a consequence of having to work things out for yourself. Teachers and parents can help children, but only if they realize that they are simply there to help learning happen; it is the learner, the child, who has to do the work. It is through exercising the brain that the brain grows, and learning proceeds.'

Wang's (1983) research on student personal control in the learning environment explores how internal locus of control, or the associated attitudes toward mastery and competence, positively relate to learning outcomes. Wang outlines (1983: 215) a conceptual model of the development and consequences of the student's perception of personal control and posits that students "who believe they can influence their learning are more likely to succeed in school than those who believe their learning is controlled by powerful others (eg. teachers and other relevant adults)."

Such findings are aligned with Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy which speaks to the capacity for students to process and weigh elements of their surroundings, consider their individual roles in the environment, and make decisions about how to act. The relationship between a student's perceived ownership of learning and the subsequent outcomes are therefore, a valuable aspect in the classroom. According to Bandura, Adams and Beyer (1977: 126) self-efficacy is an accurate predictor of performance, based on the following premise:

'Perceived self-efficacy not only influences choices of activities but, through expectations of eventual success, it can affect persistence of coping efforts once an activity is initiated. Efficacy expectations are likely to determine how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences.'

Furthermore, the research of Bandura et. al. demonstrates that the application of mastery-based instructional approaches strengthens student perceptions of control over learning outcomes. The idea that student interpretation of personal control can influence individual

circumstances has immense implications on their understanding of phenomenological experiences like learning and mindfulness.

Comparably, Galinksy's (2010) research reveals that the predominant skills needed for good learning are focus and self-control. She argues that focus and self-control could likely be as important as IQ and states that "…the more penetrating our attention, the richer and deeper our learning" (Galinksy 2010: 14). Citing a longitudinal study from Columbia University that tracked student skills and knowledge in relation to future success, they establish that, "attention [skills] allow children to focus on something in a way that maximizes the information they get out of it" (Brooks-Gunn, cited in Galinksy 2010).

In addition to personal control and self-efficacy, attributes such as willpower, drive and diligence also contribute to learner ownership. Based on the 'Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study' administered in 1995 to students of different ages in over 40 countries, researchers glean that the variance in diligence between countries especially noteworthy (Ripley 2013: 121). Signs of persistence and motivation, channeled through the notions of drive and willpower determine the predictors of how countries perform on the more substantive portions of the test, along with "the thoroughness with which students answered the survey - was more predictive of countries' scores than socioeconomic status or class size or any other factor that had been studied" (Ripley 2013: 122).

When the learner takes on the onus of their studies, notwithstanding both internal and external pressures, it can be presumed that constructive attributes generate a positive learning experience. The fact that both learning and mindfulness require similar properties of mind is in line with the idea that full engagement can give rise to a fruitful experience. The potential to apply mindfulness practice to focus one's attention, therefore, is one of the main reasons behind the burgeoning interest in incorporating such programs in schools.

2.4 Increased prevalence of mindfulness in schools

Within the span of a few decades, the introduction of mindfulness programs in schools has been steadily building momentum. The importance of prioritizing student well-being has become a shared vision amongst both international and national school systems as institutions have become increasingly interested in the idea of positive psychology in schools. Positive psychology, a recently developed branch of psychology, is grounded in theories of happiness and well-being that focus on facets that *make life worth living* as opposed to those that lead to poor mental health (Seligman, 2011). In the field of psychology, the gradual shift from focusing on mental illness to nurturing attributes of well-being has been embraced by practitioners and patients alike. Similarly, this shift has been reflected in the education system. Instead of honing in on reasons why schools fail, schools are becoming more interested in what makes them thrive and flourish.

The premise of Cherkowski and Walker (2013: 140) is that, "attending to the human flourishing of educators, themselves, is an important component of developing sustainable learning communities within which students, their families and the entire learning community can also thrive." The idea that mindfulness benefits both teachers and students is becoming increasingly well received as more evidence-based research reveals mutual reciprocity in the classroom within the framework of teaching and learning. As Schoeberlein (2009: xi) describes:

'Mindfulness and education are beautifully interwoven. Mindfulness is about being present with and to your inner experience as well as your outer environment, including other people. When teachers are fully present, they teach better. When students are fully present, the quality of their learning is better.'

The value of mindfulness for both teachers and learners lends itself to the pedagogical context. The growing acceptance of this is the foundation for the proliferation of interest in mindfulness programs around the world (Nhat Hanh 2017, Hyland 2016, Zenner et al. 2014, Mapel 2012). As school leaders recognize and give credence to the subtle balance between well-being and learning, mindfulness programs continue to

establish themselves as leading components within the well-being framework of schools.

While it is difficult to identify with precision when the mindfulness movement was first initiated in education, it is generally acknowledged that acceptance of the theory and practice of mindfulness has established a stronghold in schools. Theoretically, the idea that mindfulness can reduce mind wandering, increase attention, and potentially aid learning deems it the ideal antidote for managing school related qualms. Some claim that mindfulness may be the key ingredient to holistic learning (Mapel 2012), or understood as "the foundation and basic pre-condition for education" (Zenner et al. 2014: 2). Furthermore, given the fundamental global problems we now confront, such as climate change, along with the natural turbulence that accompanies adolescence, it is not surprising for schools to readily embrace an initiative that promotes a myriad of benefits.

Through a systematic review and meta-analysis of twenty-four school-based mindfulness interventions, Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz and Walach (2014) investigate the effects on psychological outcomes. The studies gathered include both published and unpublished work totaling 1348 students, with 876 serving as controls, enrolled from grades 1-12. The analysis was built on prior research that deemed mindfulness to be fit for implementation in schools based on its claims to improve attentional capacities, interpersonal relations, and general well-being. In fact, the research of Zenner et al. (2014: 2) is firmly based on the foundation that, "formal education should always consider the mental health and balance of children," and "mindfulness practice enhances the very qualities and goals of education in the 21st century."

Overall, the researchers conclude that, "mindfulness-based interventions in children and youths hold promise, particularly in relation to improving cognitive performance and resilience to stress" (Zenner et al. 2014: 1). But due to the diversity and heterogeneity of the studies, they found it challenging to perform a comprehensive examination of data. Acceptance of mindfulness training within a theoretical framework proved high despite some issues related to implementation or methodology. This study was innovative as the first systematic review of its kind. However, the fact that none of the studies used a strong active control proved to be a limitation. Zenner et al. (2014:

18) offer suggestions for future research such as larger and randomized studies with active controls, triangulation of measures as well as longer follow-up measures to observe benefits of mindfulness interventions. The work of Zenner et al. (2014) thus provides conclusive evidence that mindfulness-based interventions in schools is a promising avenue.

Furthermore, teacher engagement in mindfulness practice can have a direct impact on the culture of the classroom and school. From Srinivasan's (2014: 21) personal account as a classroom teacher:

'For me, teaching began as a sacred task, but with the demands of covering curriculum and supervising children, I forgot my original aspirations. Mindfulness helped reawaken the light inside myself and I came to see how mindfulness, this kind awareness of what's happening in the present moment inside of us and around us, can be a powerful tool to promote well-being in my entire school community.'

Srinivasan recounts firsthand, how mindfulness has become a source of inspiration for her as a teacher. Integrating mindfulness into her personal and professional life has led to a rich and holistic experience, a fulfilling journey which she describes with deep appreciation. Her candid account illustrates how mindfulness has served as a channel whereby both she and her students could achieve heightened awareness in their daily lives, giving rise to a deeper sense of compassion and personal growth. She describes the process as a "positive transformation" and acknowledges how mindfulness has the potential for "transforming classrooms into communities of peace and compassion" (Srinivasan 2014: 21).

Srinivasan's inspiration is but one of many classroom practitioners who have chosen to actively incorporate mindfulness into teaching practice. Thich Nhat Hanh provides extensive accounts in his overview of the compatibility between mindfulness and schools. Based on the premise that happy teachers give rise to happy students, Nhat Hanh and Weare acknowledge research with teachers that "echoes the solid evidence base that has built up over the last thirty-five years on the effects of mindfulness meditation in general" (2017: xxxix). While it is a small evidence base, it continues to grow with reports of greater tolerance, calmness, cognitive performance and overall life

satisfaction. In general, "they make better teachers, showing higher levels of classroom management and organization, with a greater ability to prioritize, to see the whole picture, and to be more self-motivated and autonomous" (Nhat Hanh and Weare 2017: xl).

When happy, mindful teachers are at the heart of a classroom, the vision to cultivate mindfulness in education at large becomes attainable. It aligns well with the claim that what works well for teachers works well for students. The Mindfulness in Schools Project (MiSP) is a UK based charity "whose aim is to inform, create, train and support the teaching of secular mindfulness to young people and those who care for them" (MiSP 2017). The organization is well established and has a methodical means of introducing mindfulness to schools through a structured curriculum built on evidence-based research. The means by which mindfulness is introduced begins with engaging school practitioners through information sessions that consider (MiSP 2017) the following topics:

- *What is mindfulness?*
- *Why mindfulness is beneficial to both teachers and students*
- *How MiSP can help you to learn mindfulness, teach mindfully and take mindfulness to your school*

The approach that MiSP adopts is one of education and engagement. The program is scaffolded such that educators curious in learning more about mindfulness have the opportunity to begin there. From this initial step to learn about the theory and background of mindfulness, the program proceeds to staff training. Once staff have engaged in the practice, they are invited to extend their learning through trainings in age appropriate mindfulness curriculum, designed by MiSP. Finally, depending on the level of school readiness, practitioners are then invited to engage in 'School Mindfulness Lead,' an opportunity for trained staff to build a sustainable model of mindfulness programming within the school (MiSP 2017).

As Weare (MiSP 2017) summarizes, "mindfulness has always had a presence in schools, but as something of a fringe activity: it is now starting to develop fairly rapidly in mainstream schools around the world." The growing literature on the impact of mindfulness has become grounds for incorporating mindfulness into teacher education

programs. Research findings from a randomized trial design of 36 urban elementary schools and 224 teachers trained in the mindfulness-based professional development program, CARE (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education) demonstrated that promoting teachers' social and emotional competence did in fact, lead to increased quality of classroom experiences (Jennings et al. 2017).

Burke and Hawkins (Mindwell 2018) discuss the importance of mindfulness in developing well-being in school communities and stress how self-care is an essential component of promoting and modeling well-being in schools. The researchers share practical means of cultivating resilience and awareness in teachers and students and demonstrate how mindfulness can serve as a foundation for building social and emotional competencies that would lead to improved wellness and cognitive functioning. They quote Stanford researcher Philippe R. Goldin on the concept of attention: "Parents and teachers tell kids 100 times a day to pay attention. But we never teach them how" (Mindwell 2018). When adults experience increased awareness, reduced stress, and other ancillary benefits of mindfulness firsthand, a positive chain of events can ensue from the classroom to the broader school community. As Burke and Hawkins (2018) stress in their work, "What we want for our children we need for ourselves."

2.4.1 A case for policy borrowing?

The idea that mindfulness continues to be presented as a universal panacea, to the extent that its practice has been mandated for countless schools, is suggestive of the impact of globalization and international influence. In order for educational systems to remain competitive, initiatives that call for 'best practices' or 'international standards' support reformative aims (Steiner-Khamsi 2014: 156). As Brown, Lauder, and Ashton (2008: 133) claim:

*'This shift from **bloody wars** to **knowledge wars** represents the highest stage in evolutionary development as nations compete for ideas, skills and knowledge that contribute to economic advantage by 'out-smarting' economic rivals. Schools, colleges, universities, think tanks, design centres and research laboratories are now on the front line in the search for competitive advantage.'*

The view that human knowledge can be shared, translated and borrowed for the sake of educational reform is not new. As Steiner Khamsi (2014: 156-163) attests, education is an industry that aims to market human capital but the concept of policy borrowing is "never wholesale, but always selective" and warns that "it is at the stage of recontextualization that criticism over the educational import surfaces." Furthermore, in Crossley's (2019: 179) reflections on the impact of policy borrowing in education, he notes the OECD's PISA as an example of how test results "are used to justify educational reforms in a diverse range of systems: reforms that can differ significantly from place to place in line with the priorities and values of local policymakers." Within the context of comparative education in a competitive global society, the ramifications of policy borrowing eventually unfold in the experience of the individuals with whom the policy has been applied – the students.

While mindfulness is not strictly a policy, it is a practice, or phenomenon born of cultural and spiritual customs. As previously discussed, its meaning is intricately complex. Therefore, the active borrowing of the notion of mindfulness practice and incorporating its use in schools may be a means of staying abreast of 'best practices' at a global scale – but to what extent? When international standards and best practices in education range in definition and context, it is conceivable that an idea as mutable as mindfulness would manifest itself differently in varying school contexts.

2.4.2 Cross-cultural considerations

In light of globalization and comparative educational practices, it is important to acknowledge the pedagogical assumptions at play. The role of culture is a significant consideration, since the values upheld both at individual and societal levels can have direct influence on pedagogical practice. In Alexander's framework of pedagogy as ideas (Alexander 2004, as cited in Daniels et. al. 2009: 17), he notes the level of culture as "the collective ideas, values, customs and relationships which inform and shape a society's view of itself, of the world and of education" and the self as "what it is to be a person; how identity is acquired." While there are other aspects that influence practice, these fundamental ideas locate teaching at the cultural and societal level and speak to the expanse of educational traditions.

Within the school context, it is important to consider how cultural constructs impact student understanding of the phenomena of mindfulness and learning. As previously introduced, the concept of mindfulness has been translated and adapted in various ways in order to obtain wider acceptance. However, the process of synthesizing elements of a philosophy into practice has vast implications that may manifest through cultural blind spots or erroneous translations. Crossley's (2012: 7) critical look at comparative education and international transference cautions policy makers of how differences in worldviews can affect implementation of research practices within the school context. He makes a case for "the potential of different approaches to be realistically acknowledged where they are appropriate…" to support capacity building in order to ensure authentic delivery of pedagogical initiatives (Crossley 2012: 8).

As Steiner Khamsi (2014: 160) further explains, the cross-cultural translation of policy and pedagogical ideas are far from straightforward and states "…what they mean in a given context varies widely. Under discussion is the rationale and pattern of translation, local adaptation, or indigenization." As a conceptual experience, mindfulness has become understood as a phenomenon that is elusive in meaning that becomes clearer through practice (Bodhi 2016, Brazier 2016, Brown 2016). Therefore, it is important to consider how cultural influences may play a role in how students experience both mindfulness and learning, as well as any associative relationship. Such considerations are significant in light of a research study that investigates how mindfulness is interpreted from vastly different cultural vantage points.

2.5 Contribution to Literature

While there is growing evidence of the benefits of mindfulness through controlled trials, there are few that engage students in in-depth qualitative reflection on their experience of mindfulness. The ability to capture firsthand student experience from two different schools is a unique opportunity. Silverman (2000: 56) touches on the importance of professionalism in qualitative research and that, among other academic criteria:

'…the thesis forms a distinct contribution to the knowledge of the subject, and affords evidence of originality by the discovery of new facts and/or the exercise of independent critical power.'

While mindfulness may have extensive historical roots, it is considered to be in its infancy stage within the educational arena. Given the discourse on policy borrowing and comparative education, it is possible to suggest the organic growth of mindfulness in Thailand in view of both cultural and religious factors. Whereas in the West, the interpretation of mindfulness gives rise to a different experience. By embarking on this qualitative research journey alongside students in two different countries who are engaging in mindfulness practice, I have the distinct privilege of gaining firsthand insight into students' perceptions of their experience and learning. Thus, the phenomenological approach of placing student voices at the core of their experience of mindfulness and learning will provide a unique contribution to the field of education.

2.5.1 Insight from the West

As previously noted, the work of Kabat-Zinn (2013) acknowledges the mindfulness evolution as a radical notion in the late 70's by Western standards, despite well founded roots in Southeast Asia. It was not until a scientific basis was formed, through clinical research and the widely accepted notion of stress as a universal condition, that mindfulness too, could be tailored for secular use. As the medical world began to embrace mindfulness as a legitimate treatment to address a range of physical and mental ailments (Kabat-Zinn, 2003: 145) such revelations opened doors to increased acceptance and interest by other sectors. In the case of schools, the familiar experience of stress and uncertainty is a phenomenon universally felt amongst young people and those who care for them.

While Amsterdam is far from an essential representation of all Western cultures, it is a cosmopolitan city. The Netherlands is known for its porous borders and liberalist views. As the world's third colonial power up until 1945, through its colonization in parts of Asia and Latin America, as well as the establishment of the Dutch East India Company and Dutch West India Company, the expanse and influence of this small country was considerable (Van der Horst 2016: 259). Its capital city is, consequently, not only the most populous, but also the most exhilarating with its crooked buildings, rich art culture, and endless canals upon which the entire municipality is built. Dutch culture is both complex and no-nonsense, characterized by an open-minded outlook on

life that echoes the well- known sayings: "Act normally, that's crazy enough," and "each to his own" (Van der Horst 2016: 24).

A welfare society, the Netherlands has a long history of providing a wide range of school choice for families, whether state run or grounded in religious beliefs (Van der Horst 2016: 50). Regardless, the Dutch culture has established a longstanding view of tolerance for different ways of thinking. While the students in this study are from an international school setting, it is important to note their local cultural context and acknowledge the community's receptivity to innovative thought and ideas such as mindfulness in schools.

2.5.2 Insight from the East

Jetiyajan (2008) speaks to the "natural meditative mind" and posits that everyone acquires this state of mind at birth. It is over the course of one's development that this meditative mind can develop into intellect. The extent of development and stimulation of this meditative mind depends on the individual and can vary immensely, as "each person's objectives, therefore, differ according to the base of the mind" (Jetiyajan 2008: 15). Since the nature of the mind has long been established as fickle and susceptible to unwholesome tendencies, meditation practice served a clear purpose to cultivate the mind; this means to refine the mind is the way of mindfulness, as practiced by Theravada and other Buddhist sects (Brahmapundit 2017: 350). Again, this segue of meditation practice in Buddhist monasteries to Western classrooms did not occur immediately. As Bodhi (2011: 20) substantiates:

'In the late 1960s and 1970s, cheaper jet travel facilitated a cultural exchange that would have far-reaching consequences. Asian teachers of Buddhism, yoga, and other spiritual disciplines came to the US and attracted followings of young people disenchanted with materialism, militarism, and the flatlands of modernity. Young westerners also travelled to Asia and studied meditation with Buddhist masters, and then on returning to their home countries began to share what they had learned with their fellow countrymen. As meditation gained in popularity, it caught the attention of medical professionals, neuroscientists, and psychotherapists, setting off an exciting conversation between practitioners of eastern spirituality and western science.'

It is at the current crossroads where we now find ourselves faced with a conundrum of intercultural, religious, and educational complexity.

If the student perceptions of learning can be shaped by their understanding of the mind, it would be elucidating to explore how cultural constructs of the mind can influence student experience of mindfulness. Such learnings may inform educators of more effective means of introducing mindfulness in schools, adding value to the field of education.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design

3.1 Overview of the chapter

As a qualitative study, the methodology of this thesis is grounded in the social constructivist framework that asserts that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work (Creswell 2013: 24). In this chapter, the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin the research are introduced and discussed. By employing the qualitative approach of interpretative phenomenological analysis, this thesis seeks to unpack the relationship between mindfulness and learning, placing the student voice at center stage.

3.2 Understanding Phenomenology

Backed by the philosophical argument of absolute experience of the world as it is, Husserl posits the 'intentionality of consciousness,' whereby "reality of an object is inextricably related to one's consciousness of it" (Creswell 2013: 77). In his meditation on pure consciousness, Husserl (1931: 147) expounds:

'…when we mentally destroy the objectivity of things - as correlate of empirical consciousness - there is nothing to limit us. We must always bear in mind that ***what things are*** *(the things about which alone we ever speak, and concerning whose being or non-being, so being or not so being, we can alone contend and reach rational decisions),* ***they are as things of experience.*** *Experience alone prescribes their meaning, and indeed, when we are dealing with things that are founded on fact, it is actual experience in its definitely ordered empirical connexions which does the prescribing.'*

As such, Husserlian phenomenology focuses on pure eidetic description or 'essences,' to illustrate lived experience. It is intentionality that is the key to understanding human experience which, according to Husserl, is based on the individual's perceptual environment.

Expanding upon Husserl's thinking, Heidegger, known to have used poetry as a basis for his mystical hermeneutics (Pivčević 1970), suggests that "language is the primordial poetry through which a people speaks being" (Heidegger 1959, as cited in Adkins 1962: 231). The idea that language may serve as a means of interpretation is a key component of

phenomenological research. The branch of phenomenology that focuses on the language of experience is 'hermeneutic phenomenology,' which designates research as "oriented toward lived experience and interpreting the 'texts' of life" (van Manen 1997, Creswell 2013).

According to van Manen (1997: 12), phenomenological research is "the attentive practice of thoughtfulness," and "a search for what it means to be human." As in Heidegger's affinity to poetry, van Manen (1997: 13) describes phenomenological research as a 'poetizing activity' that is unlike any other research:

'And that is why, when you listen to a presentation of a phenomenological nature, you will listen in vain for the punch-line, the latest information, or the big news. As in poetry, it is inappropriate to ask for a conclusion or a summary of a phenomenological study. To summarize a poem in order to present the result would destroy the result because the poem itself is the result. The poem is the thing.'

While van Manen argues that a phenomenological approach is constituted by individual interpretations of the lifeworld, Moustakas (1994) focuses more on a description of the experiences of participants (Creswell 2013: 80). This thesis aims to combine both theories in an effort to elucidate meaning from the student experience of mindfulness and learning.

3.2.1 Limitations of phenomenology

The fact that hermeneutic phenomenology is not formulaic by design and does not possess an analytical course of action by which to follow lead some to argue that "the method of phenomenology is that there is no method" (van Manen 1997: 30). In fact, the use of language to decipher meaning can lead to "species" of ambiguity and vagueness, and as Kaplan (1999: 80) points out, "the issue is not whether a term has meaning but just what its meaning might be." Furthermore, Kaplan (1999: 82) warns against "premature closure of meanings," stating that:

'As contexts of application change as well as what knowledge is available, so do the indications and their weight, and thereby also the meaning specified. Premature closure of meaning by definition is likely to provide false precision, groundless or unusable.'

The construction of meaning from language has implications not only in phenomenological research, but in learning itself. In his explanation of the phenomenon of teaching and learning, Heidegger (1968: 73) expounds that, while teaching can be viewed as giving, learning is not merely a matter of taking:

'If the student only takes over something which is offered, he does not learn. He comes to learn only when he experiences what he takes as something he himself already has. True learning only occurs where the talking of what one already has is a self-giving and is experienced as such. Teaching, therefore, does not mean anything else than to let the others learn, i.e., to bring one another to learning. Learning is more difficult than teaching; for only he who can truly learn - and only as long as he can do it - can truly teach. The genuine teacher differs from the pupil only in that he can learn better and that he more genuinely wants to learn. In all teaching, the teacher learns the most.'

Therefore, the complex task of exploring and understanding student individual experience of learning is by no means a linear process. The transference of knowledge may initially resemble a straightforward trajectory traveling from teacher to student, but there lies an essence in the distance between that can potentially determine whether this knowledge reaches its destination.

This essence, or experience, is what constitutes empirical phenomena. Herein follows another limitation to phenomenological inquiry in that preconceived notions about a phenomenon could sully the aim to unveil authentic, firsthand experience. As van Manen (1997: 46) asserts:

'…the problem is that our "common sense" pre-understandings, our suppositions, assumptions, and the existing bodies of scientific knowledge, predispose us to interpret the nature of the phenomenon before we have even come to grips with the significance of the phenomenological question.'

These pre-understandings may naturally impede the research aims of ascertaining pure findings, but Husserl (1931: 189), in recognizing this pitfall, suggests an idea he calls the 'self-suspending of the phenomenologist':

'We disconnect the whole natural world and all eidetic spheres of the transcendent order, and should thereby reach a "pure" consciousness. But did we not say just now "we" disconnect, and ***can*** *we as*

*phenomenologists set **ourselves** out of action, we who still remain members of the natural world? …But as a piece of method…we apply to ourselves the rule of phenomenological reduction which bears on our own empirical **existence** as well as on that of other beings, forbidding us to introduce a proposition which contains, implicitly or explicitly, such references to the natural Order.'*

He continues along this vein to introduce a term "bracketing" in order to "take hold of the phenomenon and then place outside of it one's knowledge about the phenomenon" (Husserl 1970b as cited in van Manen 1997: 47). An understandably challenging task, the literature suggests that it is therefore important to make our assumptions explicit in order to come to terms with them, "not in order to forget them again, but rather to hold them deliberately at bay and even to turn this knowledge against itself, as it were, thereby exposing its shallow or concealing character" (van Manen 1997: 47).

It is worth noting again that for the purpose of this thesis, the phenomenology of both student *experience of learning* as well as student *experience of mindfulness* are of equal interest. Both phenomena require thoughtful attention to student responses and reflections in order to deduce patterns of thought while practicing great care and caution so that pre-understandings do not influence any findings. Having determined the phenomena to be explored, subsequent procedures involve a data collection process from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon in order to develop "clusters of meaning" from participant statements into themes (Creswell 2013, Moustakas 1994).

3.2.2 Importance of language and writing to interpret experience

The role of language cannot be taken lightly in the context of educational research. It is through words by which epistemological questions can be explored and disseminated to further understanding. A valuable medium of expression, language has been viewed as "related to experience, to form, to meaning, to structure, to practice, and to tool" (Stone 2005: 36). Classical pragmatists such as Dewey acknowledge the relationship between human experience and language within the context of pedagogy (Harris 2012, Stone 2005, Prawat 1995) and in his vision of power-knowledge Foucault (2012: 305) illustrates how the impact of language and its expansive relations can form the basis of knowing:

'And there is nothing surprising in this, in fact, since, throughout the Classical age, the words that languages were thought to be composed of, and the characters that were used in the attempt to constitute a natural order, had had the same, the identical, status: they existed only by virtue of the representative value they possessed, and the power of analysis, of duplication, of composition and arrangement that they were accorded with regard to the things represented.'

The idea that words within any language contribute to constructed meaning is the cornerstone of Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology (Stone 2005), which justifies the imperative to treat all elements of speech with respect, since it gives rise to both meaning and interpretation. This point is particularly critical, given the fact that this research is conducted in two languages: English and Thai.

Therefore, the conveyance of language and meaning, in the context of hermeneutic phenomenology, may take the form of writing as a medium between the lifeworld (van Manen 1997: 125):

'Writing fixes thought on paper. It externalizes what in some sense is internal; it distances us from our immediate lived involvements with the things of our world. As we stare at the paper, and stare at what we have written, our objectified thinking now stares back at us. Thus, writing creates the reflective cognitive stance that generally characterizes the theoretic attitude in the social sciences. The object of human science research is essentially a linguistic project: to make some aspect of our lived world, of our lived experience, reflectively understandable and intelligible.'

As a pivotal tool within the phenomenological approach to research, it is these individual descriptions of experience (Moustakas 1994) as well as individual interpretations of the lifeworld (van Manen 1997) that will inform how participants construct meaning from experience.

3.3 Mindfulness befitting the qualitative approach

The choice to focus on an entirely qualitative approach reflects the very essence of mindfulness as phenomenon. The analysis of qualitative data is often referred to as an art because it entails the subtle technique of seeking to understand human experience through words rather than numbers (Schutt 2012: 321). Qualitative research in itself is not a

clearly defined form of analysis. There exist numerous approaches to qualitative research, but the general intention is to explore the outside world from an internal lens. One such approach is designed to understand and explain social phenomena by analyzing experiences of individuals or groups through the exploration and interpretation of everyday knowledge, practices, accounts and stories (Flick 2007: x).

Another noteworthy aspect of qualitative research, particularly in regards to the study of social phenomena, is the focus on exploring human experience in its natural context as it unfolds. By design, it is an approach that veers away from strictly defined measures to test hypotheses (Flick 2007). Working with individuals and gauging human experience is a sensitive venture that requires thoughtful care and respect. The process of qualitative analysis maintains a focus on meaning. Furthermore, the collection of data on few cases for more comprehensive and in-depth findings requires the researcher to engage in reflective practice that acknowledges one's biases as a researcher while remaining open to reflexivity, whereby conclusions are "strengthened by an honest and informative account about how the researcher interacted with subjects in the field" (Schutt 2012: 332).

The idea of reflexivity is an important aspect of the interpretative phenomenological approach given the aim to understand a social experience that, by nature, would vary from individual to individual. As the sole researcher in this journey to explore individual experience of mindfulness and its impact on learning, the need for reflexivity is required, particularly given my personal background and interest. Furthermore, this methodological approach entails the collection of a number of social data including both student interactions through pre and post interviews, along with journal reflections. As Coffey (2014: 8-19) states, "analysis of documents allows us to make sense of the social world" and adds that "all documentary accounts are just that - a constructed account rather than necessarily an 'accurate' portrayal of complex social reality." This constructed account is the essence of an emic focus, by which this research study abides, where the information gathered represents the setting in terms of the participants and from their perspectives (Schutt 2012: 322, Prior 2003).

Lastly, the use of a research diary to note the transpiring of events and experiences further supports the study of phenomenological understanding. Throughout this exploration of human experience, it is important to keep a record that represents the development of

one's thinking, encourage reflection, and support time management (Silverman 2000: 193). This practice allows for tracking of learnings and challenges throughout the research study and also serves as a best practice to support authentic findings. Furthermore, the reflective aspect of keeping a research diary mirrors the student participants' commitment in the study, making for comparable practice from an interpretive standpoint.

3.4 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The subjective nature of mindfulness lends itself well to a phenomenological epistemology that aims to understand people's experience of reality (Braun and Clarke 2006: 83) guided by flexibility in research. Considered a philosophy that calls for "an analysis of 'the things themselves'," Eberle explicates the value of phenomenology as a qualitative research methodology in the study of human experience (2014: 185). The application of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative approach that allows the researcher to unveil the essence or significance of human experience (Smith et al., 2013, Moustakas 1994). The complexities of human experience are vast and nuanced, warranting qualitative research methods that give experience primacy while striking a methodological balance in the objective to explicate phenomenon (Holloway and Todres 2003: 347).

Since the experience of mindfulness is one that is both personal and individual, given its endurance as a centuries old practice, the phenomenon deserves a degree of respect and open-minded consideration. This methodology thus seems a fitting one since the phenomenological approach is geared towards studying the conscious, direct experience of the individual. As Eberle (2014: 191) elaborates:

'Phenomenology provides an epistemological framework and has proved seminal for elucidating how sense and meaning are constituted in subjective consciousness and how they are constructed in everyday interaction and in scientific observations and interpretations.'

Therefore, the design of this research study is primarily qualitative in scope in order to capture the phenomenological experience of mindfulness practice.

3.5 Using thematic analysis and portraiture to interpret phenomenon

To extract meaning from reported accounts of a given experience requires a qualitative analytic method of interpretation that can break down the phenomenon in a deliberate way. Thematic analysis is a frequently used method within qualitative research due to its flexibility and accessibility. As Braun and Clarke (2006: 83) illustrate, thematic discourse analysis serves to identify patterns and themes within data, thereby theorizing language "as constitutive of meaning and meaning as social." Especially when data consist of words and not numbers, it is imperative to employ a rigorous approach to analysis in order to justify methodologically sound findings.

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest a guide to thematic analysis that involves becoming familiar with the data through careful transcription followed by a filtered approach that first explores broad ideas in order to produce codes. It is by sifting through this data whereby patterns emerge to determine themes and sub-themes that can refine a phenomenon in a meaningful way. As in any methodology, there are potential pitfalls to this thematic approach that can lead to weak or unconvincing analysis, but by being explicit about the theory and method employed, thematic analysis can indeed be considered a rigorous qualitative method.

Once themes have emerged from the initial interview analysis it is important to remain true to the student voice in order to represent direct experience. Another phenomenological paradigm suitable for capturing "the essence of the human experience" is portraiture (Hill-Brisbane 2008). Through this methodological approach, emergent themes are constructed by interpretative voice to reflect the aesthetic whole (Hill-Brisbane 2008: 646):

'Portraits, the product or the aesthetic whole of portraiture, have four dimensions: conception, the development of the overarching story; structure, the sequencing and layering of emergent themes that scaffold the story; form, the movement of the narrative of the story; and cohesion, the unity and integrity of the story.'

It is through this method of portraiture that enables the exemplar students a platform for their reflections and interpretations. Following the interview analyses are detailed

portraits of four exemplar students and their thoughts on the themes that emerged. This multipronged approach in exploring student experience of mindfulness and learning is an effort to capture an authentic representation of human phenomena. Within a theoretical framework that draws from the work of Dewey and Vygotsky whereby direct experience in knowledge acquisition is of primary importance, these methodological approaches align well with the objective of understanding student experience. Furthermore, the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis is equally valuable in order to glean meaning from student experience in two languages from two different contexts.

3.6 Elements of constructivist theory

Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, grounded in the collaborative nature of learning, provides a relevant springboard in the investigation of student experience. According to Vygotsky (1978: 57):

'Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level and, later on, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals.'

This sequential unfolding of experience coincides with Dewey's theory on the metaphysics of human experience whereby form and content of language are not separated. In Harris' (2012: 21) exploration of Dewey's new theory of language, he clarifies the definition of inquiry that, "requires both clarification and unification." As meaning is formed from experience, language is used to depict meaning (2012: 22):

'The explicit formulation of such conditions arises through communication, or language acquisition and use, even if in the most primitive form of an expectation in a social context. The possibility of social participation or sharing depends on a common reference.'

The importance of language in understanding human experience is therefore, a vital component in interpreting student experience within their respective cultural contexts. While there are innumerable branches of constructivist theory, a common understanding among these variations is that "learning and understanding are regarded as inherently

social; cultural activities and tools (ranging from symbol systems to artifacts to language) are regarded as integral to conceptual development" (Daniels et al. 2009: 31). As social constructivism is mainly concerned with explication of experience, the interpretation of phenomena in this study will be underpinned by these ontological and philosophical views.

3.7 Ethics and responsible research

It is the social researcher's responsibility to ensure merit, respect and integrity throughout the scope of the investigation. The importance of establishing trust with study participants is paramount, but responsible research requires ethical steps within academic code of conduct (Fisher and Anushko 2008: 6). Prior to the collection of any data, due diligence on ethical research practice entailed departmental approval in accordance with guidelines published by the British Educational Research Association (BERA), the Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2012) and the University of Bath's Code of Good Practice in Research Integrity (University of Bath 2017). This thesis complies with the University of Bath's Ethical Implication for Research Activities (EIRA 1) that includes quality assurance that no undue distress (whether physical or psychological) may befall the young people involved in the study. As such, thoughtful consideration was given to core standards of honesty, rigor, transparency and open communication, care and respect (University of Bath 2018).

Honesty

Research integrity was demonstrated through the honest presentation of goals and intentions. Permission to conduct research was obtained at multiple levels including the university, individual schools, and families. Informed consent was also granted from study participants prior to the collection of data. At the conclusion of the study, participants signed an additional consent form to indicate their agreement that any learnings gained from their reflective journals would be used for educational purposes only. This form stressed adherence to relevant Data Protection Laws like the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the UK's Data Protection Act in the processing of personal data (University of Bath 2018). Furthermore, upon collection of the journals, the final consent form reminded participants that if there were any reflections that were cause for concern, the researcher would follow due diligence and report such information to the appropriate authorities to ensure the student's safety.

Rigor

The ambitious goal to seek out twenty students in two different countries to participate in a study requiring a full year's worth of journal reflections required meticulous note-taking and management of data in two languages. Even more, the fact that half of the students in each cohort would be asked to engage in mindfulness practice seemed a lot to ask of high school aged students, already burdened with a full college preparatory workload. The tracking of data in both schools and countries entailed continuous follow-up while maintaining an impartial distance to study participants.

Transparency and open communication

Communications began early with both schools in order to secure appropriate permissions as well as allow for ample time to determine sample groups and conduct preliminary interviews. This preparatory work began in July of 2017 by initiating contact with a school in Amsterdam and my current place of employment, as well as heads of schools in Thailand through Thai educational networks. Although I am employed at one of the schools in the research study, I did not work directly with the students so any impact in this regard should have been minimal, if any.

Study participants and their parents were informed about the nature of the research study and assured of confidentiality. As the researcher invested in the project both personally and professionally, thoughtful consideration was ascertained in regards to any potential conflicts of interest. According to Fisher and Anushko (2008) the importance of upholding ethical code of conduct is to prevent any possible conflict of interest whereby any aspect of the research may be comprised. This research study aimed to be a transparent process from the start in order to glean high quality results representing authentic human experience.

Care and respect

The design of this qualitative research study required one year's worth of data from high school students already burdened with the pressures of coursework and other commitments, so the scope of this investigation was meant to inflict the least encumbrance to all involved. The well-being of study participants was of primary importance; expectations of the research were clearly outlined and those involved in the mindfulness

course understood that it was on a voluntary basis. In both schools, mindfulness practice was voluntary and did not impinge on student academic programming. The purpose of conducting this ambitious research study in two countries was to potentially add value to the growing field of mindfulness in schools.

3.8 Positionality in qualitative research

The ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin educational research are significant considerations within research design so it is equally important to address the issue of positionality. Since positionality entails a researcher's philosophical stance and basic assumptions about reality and human nature, it is critical to reflect on this role when conducting ethical educational research. As Sikes (2004: 19) emphasizes:

'… it is important for all researchers to spend some time thinking about how they are paradigmatically and philosophically positioned and for them to be aware of how their positioning - and the fundamental assumptions they hold - might influence their research related thinking and practice. This is about being a reflexive and reflective and, therefore, a rigorous researcher who is able to present their findings and interpretations in the confidence that they have thought about, acknowledged and been honest and explicit about their stance and the influence it has had upon their work.'

Taking into consideration my own personal values and professional beliefs about mindfulness and its application within education, it was necessary to take thoughtful measures within the research design to limit influence.

3.9 Positionality within the context of this study

From the onset, I was aware of how my role as researcher might be viewed differently at both schools. At the school in Amsterdam, where I am currently employed, student participants knew of me, but did not know me, since I had started working at the school in August 2017. As a school counselor working primarily with families in grades 11 and 12, the students surveyed for my study were at the time, in grades 9 and 10. Therefore, their first introduction to me was as a counselor for upper grades and a researcher interested in student learning.

Once students were promoted to 11th grade, five of the ten students in the Amsterdam cohort were officially students in my caseload. By December of 2018, due to attrition, as post-interviews were conducted and journals were scheduled to be collected, four of these students remained under my tutelage. The design of our counseling curriculum is such that the first half of the year is focused heavily on 12th grade academics and university applications. Thus, while students participating in my study may have viewed me as a figure of authority, any conflict of interest would have been minimal because our individual work did not begin until January 2019, after data collection was complete.

My position as researcher, I presume, may have influenced engagement from the BKK cohort due to cultural differences and the nature by which access to students was procured. In Thai culture, respect for one's elders is an established value. Furthermore, anyone linked to education and in a position to grant knowledge, similarly deserves respect. When seeking permission to work with students at the Thai school, I too, needed to follow implicit cultural protocols that began with gaining access to the head of school. While communications were successful, there was a degree of ceremony involved to assure the school that the aims of my research were legitimate and that the students' time would be both worthwhile and educational.

The Thai students were consistently respectful in their exchanges with me. The fact that all ten students in the BKK cohort completed the study may be attributed to their view of me as someone who was both an educator and an elder. By committing to participate in this year-long research study, the students took this responsibility seriously; leaving the project would not have been a consideration. Doing so would have been both culturally and socially shameful, as their participation was considered an honor and privilege.

Recognizing the variance of how the researcher 'position' could influence student participation, measures were established to align the mindfulness component of the study in both schools to the extent possible. In Amsterdam, I deliberately chose not to be the instructor for test students who signed up for the mindfulness program. Both schools were assigned a teacher to work with test students directly. Up until December 2018, when the scope of the research took an unexpected turn, the plan was for each school to have a dedicated teacher charged with monitoring test group students, providing for some distance between researcher and participants.

Chapter 4: Methods and Data Collection

4.1 Overview of the chapter

This chapter details the various aspects of the research design to provide an overall picture of the phenomenological exploration. It acknowledges the complexity of a multi-case study that spans a full calendar year to garner data from test and comparison student groups in two different countries. The variance in school and cultural contexts dictate the manner in which pre and post arrangements are employed. The methods that remain constant across all student groups are demonstrated through the coordination of pre and post interviews and the year-long reflection journals. Despite eventual attrition and an unanticipated change to the mindfulness program in Bangkok, the data collected remains relevant to the original aims of the research.

4.2 Multi-case study

Bearing in mind the importance of research integrity, the fact that this endeavor entailed the cooperation of schools and students in two different countries led to considerations of cultural equivalence in every aspect of the study. Cultural equivalence refers to the aim to translate one culturally rooted word to another target language in order to achieve an equally equivalent connotation (Fisher and Anushko 2008), a concept that was an ongoing consideration throughout the course of this research. Group and cultural differences are naturally significant aspects of research that could potentially influence study outcomes. At the same time, the variance among participants add to the originality of this research, with mindfulness practice serving as the common denominator.

4.2.1 Pre-arrangements

Preparations for research at the secondary school in Amsterdam were relatively straightforward, whereas cultural differences immediately presented themselves in my attempts to secure a school in Bangkok. In Amsterdam, appropriate channels were followed to procure authorization to conduct research within the school. Communications with the Director and Associate Director of the school about my research aims began well before the start of school. Based on current admissions protocol, admitted students and families sign a basic release upon enrollment that

informs them about occasional research conducted at the school for educational purposes. Still, specific, informed consent was requested for all students interested in partaking in the study. Upon submitting a proposal and rationale for the study, approval to commence research at the school was granted without difficulty.

The process for obtaining school permissions and determining sample groups in Bangkok, on the other hand, required a culturally appropriate approach. Initial attempts to communicate with heads of school via email were unsuccessful. As it were, most Thai people prefer communicating via a social media application called LINE as opposed to email. As a result, once I connected with a school director through the LINE application, albeit cumbersome due to the nature of texting in Thai, I was able to relay my research aims and objectives. This school director kindly connected me with a fellow colleague and school director who also shared an interest in mindfulness research. A translated version of my research proposal was subsequently sent and approved.

4.2.2 Mindfulness programs and instructors

The Mindfulness in Schools Project (MiSP) - program in Amsterdam

The Mindfulness in Schools Project (MiSP) is a well-respected and recognized program established in the UK (Mindfulness in Schools Project 2017) that has gained considerable interest since its inception in 2007. This evidence-based curriculum is age-appropriate and incorporates both theory and practice. In order to become a certified teacher in the entitled '.b program', interested candidates need to apply to the MiSP program and demonstrate prior knowledge and experience of mindfulness from a certified training program. Participants who have met the prerequisites to attend the 4-day training course are taught lessons that equip them to teach .b curriculum to 11-18 year-olds. The lessons are complete with instructional materials that gradually and methodically introduce adolescents to an introduction to secular mindfulness. In Amsterdam, a member of staff who had recently completed the .b Mindfulness in Schools training and was certified to teach the curriculum to high school students demonstrated interest in partaking in my research. Research aims were discussed and the test cohort of students participating in the .b program was set to commence by spring of 2018.

The newly certified teacher who agreed to engage in this study shared considerable enthusiasm for the MiSP program and was keen to begin instruction with students. Her interest to teach aligned well with my provision for a test group of student participants in a certified mindfulness program. Given the nature of our school calendar and various scheduling demands, we agreed that she would begin the MiSP instruction in March 2018. The program would take place after school for a total of ten weeks. Students would be assigned homework at the end of each lesson and encouraged to practice mindfulness techniques prior to the next session.

High Meditation Instructor Course - program in Bangkok

The High Meditation Instructor Course was developed by master teacher and Lord Abbot, Phratep Jetiyajan to build on fundamental theoretical and practical components of the preceding Meditation Instructor Course established in 1997 (Jetiyajan 2008). Having received wide acceptance and interest from practitioners both in Thailand and internationally, Phratep Jetiyajan developed this High Meditation Instructor Course as a means to encourage more in-depth practice towards insight meditation (Jetiyajan 2008). The course serves to explicate complex Buddhist insight theory into laymen terms that can be applied universally among individuals as well as society at large. The basic practice of meditation, when exercised correctly and consistently, can lead to strengthening of the mind. Known as Right Meditation (Pali or Sanskrit: Sammasamadhi), continual practice may give rise to "advanced knowledge by providing effective intellectual development" (Jetiyajan 2008: 17).

The school in Bangkok that agreed to partake in this study chose to follow this High Meditation Instructor Course as its teachings aligned well with their vision and daily mission. Unfortunately, despite regular communications, I learned at the end of the calendar year that the school decided to fully unfold this course to a younger cohort of students. The test students in the study were exposed to only elements of this course. Still, the school's director acknowledged the fact that meditation practice had already been an integral part of the school's programming. They maintained that the students who were dedicated to individual meditation practice would be adequate test group candidates. It was the school's general belief that meditation practice, whether through sustained formal application or dedicated self-practice, was advantageous to learning.

Two different countries, two different programs

There are several distinctions worth noting between the two programs employed in this study. At face value, the titles of the programs have some observable differences. The MiSP program includes mindfulness in the title, which could suggest that mindfulness can be readily achieved. While the evidence-based program is well researched and established by field experts, mindfulness remains a very individual phenomenon. The MiSP (2017) claim that their courses are "written by teachers, for teachers and succeed consistently with all types of pupils, according to both the research evidence and overwhelmingly positive feedback," could be potentially misleading for individuals looking for a quick remedy. At the same time, the curriculum is well organized and well researched; lesson plans use student friendly language and provide realistic, relatable examples.

The High Meditation Instructor Course also has implications in its title. Since the word meditation is in the title, this difference immediately identifies meditation as a means towards mindfulness. In this case, meditation appears as a pathway towards increased well-being. Furthermore, the fact that this course expands upon learnings from a previous course on insight meditation indicates that participants should have already had some degree of experience in mindfulness meditation. Given the context of the all-girls school in Bangkok, where both their value system and meditation practice are grounded in Buddhist philosophy, the decision to follow the High Meditation Instructor Course, established by a Buddhist monk, seemed a practical choice.

The complexity of conducting research in two different countries and schools can undoubtedly lead to a number of variables that could influence the course and outcome of the study. Bearing this in mind, matters regarding conflict of interest, informed consent and cultural equivalence were of primary significance. As the sole researcher in this endeavor, meticulous care was dedicated to the collection and organization of data as well as the transcription and interpretation of text in English and Thai. The study proceeded with an open-minded approach and any unforeseen setbacks were viewed as opportunities for growth and analysis.

4.2.3 Selection of participants

To determine the mindfulness and comparison groups in Amsterdam, a google form survey was sent to all students in 9th and 10th grade to ensure a high degree of student interest. This survey queried some practical aspects as well, such as whether or not the student knew if they would be enrolled at the school next year, an important factor needed for year-long collection of data. Further, the survey communicated the voluntary commitment being asked of participants, thereby ensuring genuine interest. To gauge which students would comprise the test and reference groups, I also asked if they had practiced mindfulness before or had an interest in learning more about mindfulness. Based on the student responses to the google form survey, I identified the respective groupings.

Students identified for the test group indicated an interest in mindfulness and learning more about practice and techniques. Students identified for the reference group were interested in reflecting on their learning, but not necessarily in mindfulness practice. All students understood and agreed to the year-long commitment to reflective journaling about their experience of learning. Given the composition of an international school, the resulting student samples were a mix of genders and ethnicities. Once test and reference groups were established, I notified students and their parents individually to formally invite them to partake in my study and obtain informed consent.

Due to the degree of bureaucracy involved in gaining access to a Thai school, coupled with the nature of our communications (consisting entirely of online texting in Thai), it was admittedly a rather complex process to connect with a school that would be a match for my research. It was not until I had the opportunity to meet the director of the all girls' school that I was able to formally obtain permission to work with their students. At this director's meeting I shared a translated version of the informed consent letter that was used for the school in Amsterdam. After explaining the nature of my research, the director sought the assistance of a classroom teacher to hand select students for participation in my study. Additionally, upon the director's request, I needed to submit a formal letter from the university acknowledging approval of my research plans. At the conclusion of this meeting, it was understood that permission was

granted for me to conduct research with their students around the topic of mindfulness in schools.

Clearly, the selection of participants differed at both schools due to accessibility and the nature of permission granted. In Amsterdam, the google form survey was an objective instrument that allowed me to pull test and reference samples that reflected student interest in participating in the study as well as their experience with mindfulness. On the other hand, I was unable to deliver a comparable google survey for the school in Bangkok given my limited access to students. As such, I needed to proceed with the school's corroboration to select suitable test and reference groups that met the aims of my research. I determined that as long as both sets of test and reference groups met the selection criteria (participation in a mindfulness program versus non-participation), the research would proceed beginning with preliminary interviews.

Upon completion of the interviews, thematic analysis was employed to determine the most prominent and relevant themes. After transcribing the interviews, coupled with the review of student journals, exemplar cases were selected to provide a more detailed account of the individual experience through the method of portraiture.

4.2.4 Reflection journals

All twenty students in both Bangkok and Amsterdam were given A5 lined journals to record their thoughts. Both test and reference groups were asked to use the notebooks to reflect on their experience of learning. During the preliminary interviews, I explained the need for this study to be as authentic as possible in order to capture the student's voice. Students were encouraged to write whenever they felt compelled to, that the activity need not be a forced exercise consisting of structured entries. Aside from preliminary and exit interviews with me, they would receive monthly 'gentle reminder' emails that their journals remained available to them if and when they were ready to write about their learning.

The reflection journals represented a crucial means of data collection. It is through the students' reflective writing whereby evidence of experience of mindfulness and learning materialized. While the pre-interviews garnered emergent themes, the

reflection journals determined which students would be identified as exemplar cases for this thesis. The students who wrote substantive entries that were relevant to the research aims were chosen for a more in-depth analysis, thus providing a portraiture or narrative of the emergent themes (Hill-Brisbane 2008).

4.3 Mindfulness in Western and Eastern school settings

By crossing cultural and linguistic boundaries, this phenomenological investigation aimed to gauge the universality of the experience of mindfulness and its potential impact on learning. Bearing in mind the small research endeavor, there were a number of variables that were not constant in regard to school composition, student body, and community culture. Furthermore, the possibility that participants may provide socially desirable responses was a valid concern. To guard against this bias, the thematic analysis employed from the pre-interviews aimed to gauge a broader picture of the data prior to selecting exemplar cases who best represented each sub-sample. Given the shared interest in exploring mindfulness and its impact on student learning, both schools were solid choices in this exploration.

4.3.1 Interviews

Once informed consent was obtained from both schools and students, families, administrators and staff were aware of the nature of my study, I set out to conduct pre-interviews for all students. In December 2017, I met with each of the students in Amsterdam for approximately 30 minutes during their lunch hour or after school, to engage them in a set of questions to ascertain their views on learning and mindfulness. Once the school in Amsterdam closed for the winter holidays, I travelled to Bangkok in order to meet with the other 10 students for their individual pre-interviews. All pre-interviews were completed by 29 December 2017 with the understanding that reflective journaling was to begin in January 2018. All students were informed that upon completion of this year-long study, they would receive gifts of appreciation to thank them for their participation.

4.3.2 Pre and post interview questions

Twenty-three pre-interview questions were drafted to gauge students' current perceptions of themselves as learners and their learning experience. The open-ended

questions allowed for reflection as students grappled with how they would define broad concepts like mindfulness, learning, and whether any relationship existed between these experiences. All students were asked their permission for interviews to be recorded. Prior to each interview, each student was thanked for their participation, informed about the nature of the study, and reminded of their prerogative to withdraw from the study at any time.

During the post-interviews, a twenty-fourth question was added that posed, if a student engaged in mindfulness practice, whether the experience had any impact on their learning. Also, as seen in Appendix A, an 'end of research study consent form' was signed to remind participants that upon collection of their journals, I would abide by the university's data protection laws and respect the anonymity of their identity and contributions to the study. Furthermore, if I were to read any worrisome journal reflections, I was ethically bound to report such concerns to the appropriate school staff to ensure the student's safety.

4.4 Attrition and unanticipated change to mindfulness programming

When this research project began in December 2017, a total of twenty students had agreed to participate. Unfortunately, the study was impacted by a degree of attrition from student participants in Amsterdam. Furthermore, an unexpected turn of events surfaced during the visit to Bangkok in December 2018. While these unanticipated circumstances were unfortunate, the research study proceeded steadily, with slight modifications.

In Amsterdam, once the MiSP meetings began in March 2018, one student in the test group informed me of her inability to commit to mindfulness sessions over the course of ten weeks. In December 2018, when post-interviews were scheduled, two students from the reference group also backed out of the project claiming that they simply did not have the time to write continuously in their reflection journals. This unexpected news was disappointing, especially since I had been in regular, monthly contact with all participants to remind them of the study and their commitment to journaling. Consequently, the study consisted of seven participants (four test, three reference) in Amsterdam by December 2018.

In Bangkok, despite communications with both students and teaching staff throughout 2018, it was not until the post-interview visit in December 2018 when I learned that the test students did *not* undergo the formal High Meditation Instructor Course program. The communications through the LINE application — in March, July and November 2018 regarding student progress in the study yielded indirect responses. It was during the first post-interview with a test group student when I learned that she was not part of a formalized mindfulness group. As it turned out, the school launched their High Meditation Instructor Course for a younger student cohort; students in my study were exposed to elements of the program, but were not engaged in formalized training. The decision to introduce the formal mindfulness course to the younger grades was a school-wide consideration that was a rational choice for the institution, but regrettably, did not coincide well with the initial research plans.

Upon inquiring about this setback, the students in my study were considered 'upper matthayom' students, essentially in equivalent 10th and 11th grades and would not have had the time to partake in a separate mindfulness program. The school maintained that students selected for the test group were engaged in meditation and mindfulness practice on their own time and were exposed to elements of the school-wide mindfulness training based in the High Meditation Instructor Course program. After the initial disappointment of learning about the surprising research developments, the post-interviews continued. Notwithstanding the variance in the two test groups, it soon became evident that the Bangkok test students did in fact, practice mindfulness meditation on their own and their journals provided valuable insights to reflect this.

Chapter 5: Research Findings

5.1 Overview of the chapter

This chapter presents a bird's-eye view of the data analysis prior to identifying the exemplar case students for more individual insights into the learner experience. As previously discussed, the essence of lived experience (Husserl 1931) and use of language to explicate human perceptions (Heidegger 1959) encompass the spirit of phenomenological research. The process of transcription and translation allowed for a broad exploration of recurrent phrases, ideas, and emerging themes. Figures 1 through 4 illustrate initial perceptions of mindfulness, learning, and any relationship between the two phenomena. These preliminary findings set the stage for subsequent analysis of the reflection journals and post interviews. The iterative process of thematic analysis and interpretation led to nuanced meanings due to differences in culture and language - a significant realization that is the crux of this research study.

5.2 Pre-interview analysis

The nature of the open-ended pre-interview questions were reflective by design. For instance, word association questions such as: "What words come to mind when you think of mindfulness?" and "What words come to mind when you think of learning?" provided space for students to explore possible definitions. Designed to encourage students to think from various angles, questions like: "How do you know if you have learned something?" and "How important is attention in learning?" provided infrastructure for relevant themes to emerge. The direct translations of these questions to Thai, while linguistically correct, did not render the most precise interpretations. Nevertheless, when students asked for further clarification, I would ask the same question in a different, more informal manner. This flexibility to restate questions in a more conversational way allowed students the latitude to further elaborate on their responses.

Following the transcription and translation of preliminary interviews, the hermeneutic process of furnishing meaning from student words required meticulous analysis. The application of NVivo qualitative data analysis software was a helpful tool in both the coding of data and organization of themes. The iterative process of reviewing student responses and determining meaning and relevance in two languages required continual reflexivity as a researcher. Based on the twenty-three interview questions, two major

themes (perceptions of mindfulness and potential impact of mindfulness on learning), accompanied by eight sub-themes (lack of knowledge, awareness, calm, religion, meditation, feeling less stressed, effect on learning, and effect prior to exams), emerged.

Figure 1 displays initial student perceptions of mindfulness for all twenty participants. Based on these preliminary findings, it is noteworthy that the Amsterdam students have a range of understanding of mindfulness. When further separated by test and reference groups (Figure 2), the Bangkok students solidly connote mindfulness with awareness and meditation. The span of perceptions amongst the Amsterdam participants illustrate one test student connoting mindfulness to awareness and one reference student who associates the phenomenon to meditation. At this early stage, it appears that the students in Bangkok have a sound understanding of mindfulness.

Figure 1. **Aggregate responses representing student perceptions of mindfulness**

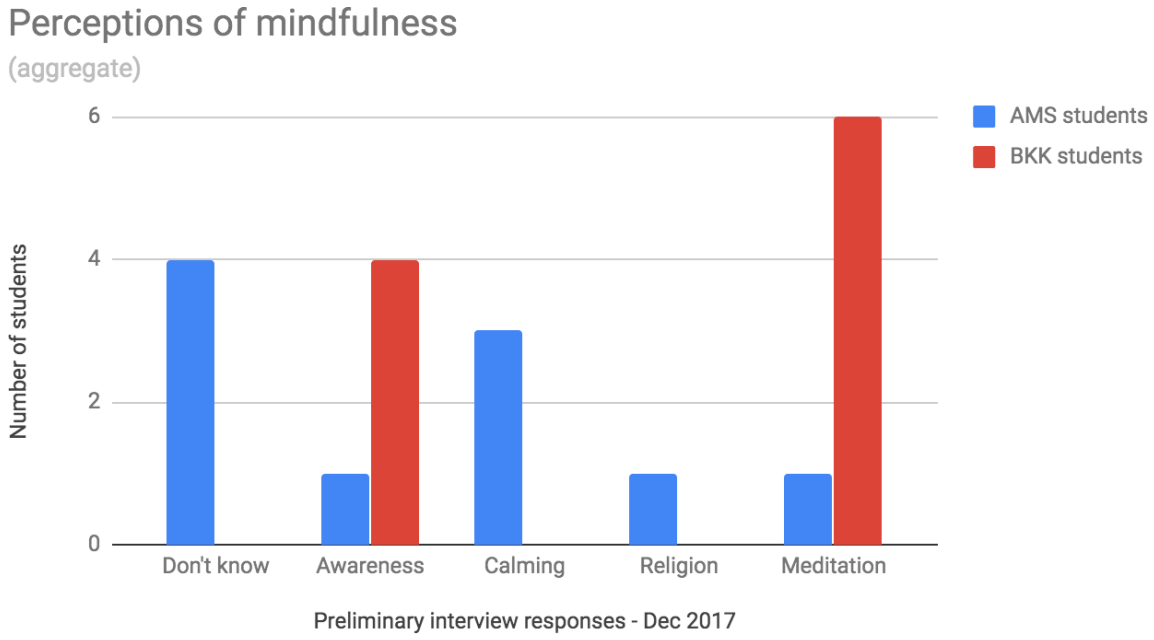
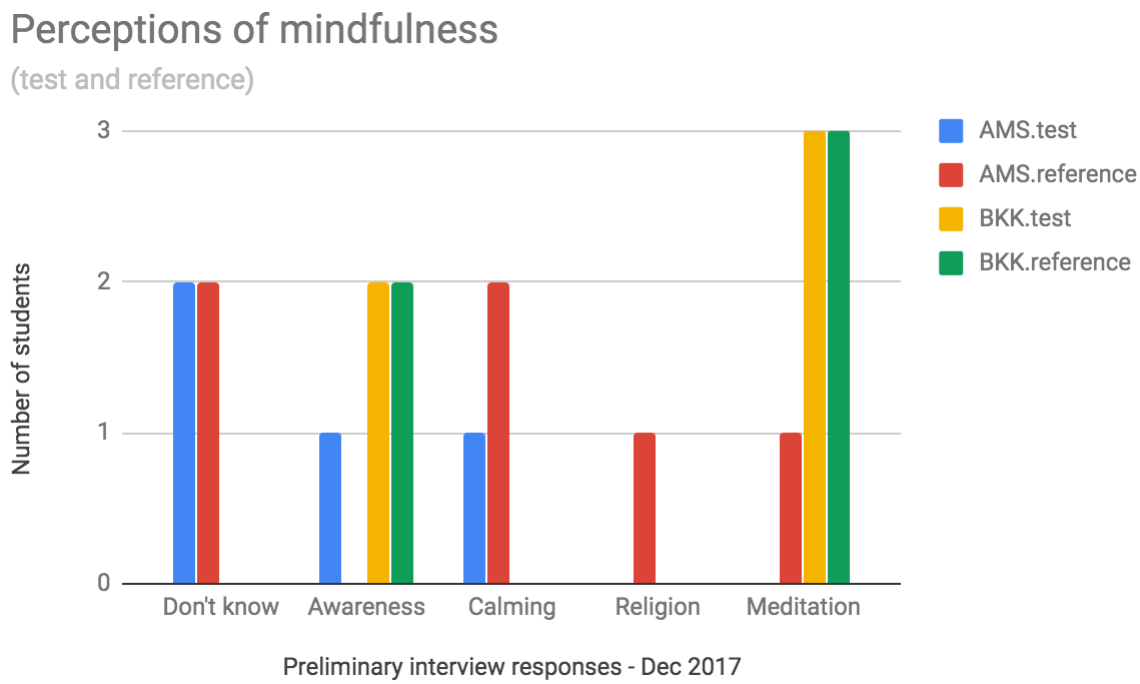
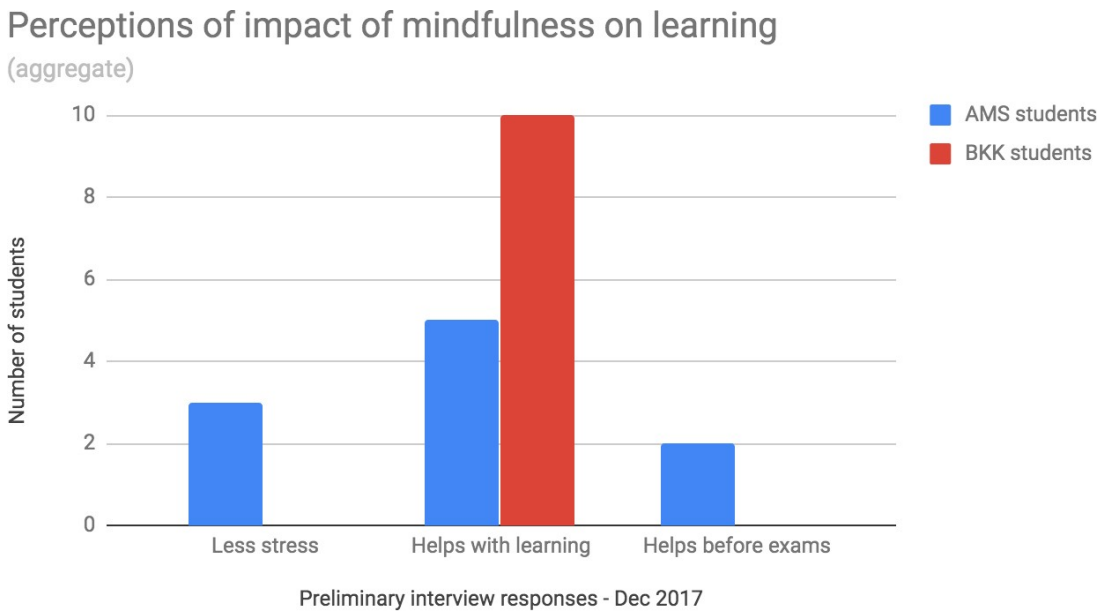


Figure 2. **Student perceptions of mindfulness separated by test and reference groups**



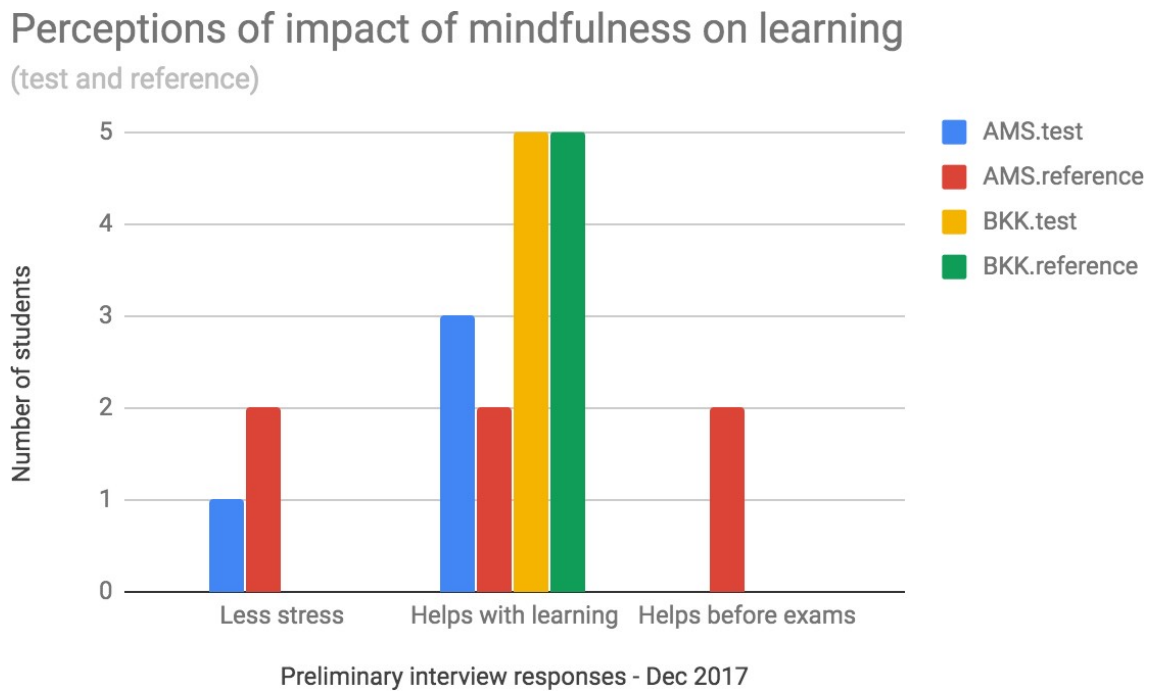
Based on questions that queried aspects of learning, attention, classroom environment, and potential impact of mindfulness, Figure 3 depicts all Bangkok students' perception of mindfulness having a positive influence on learning. The Amsterdam students' range of perceptions is also interesting, illustrating that some perceive a connection between mindfulness and learning while others perceive a relationship with stress or anxiety before exams.

Figure 3. **Student perceptions of impact of mindfulness on learning**



When separated by test and reference groups in Figure 4, the graph illustrates again, the range of viewpoints amongst the Amsterdam students in comparison to students from Bangkok.

Figure 4. **Student perceptions of impact of mindfulness on learning separated by test and reference groups**



5.3 Experience of learning and mindfulness in Amsterdam and Bangkok

Following the pre-interviews in December 2017, students were asked to engage in reflective journaling to record their experience of learning over the course of one calendar year. When obtaining informed consent, students were asked to write whenever they felt compelled to do so; the recording of thoughts and feelings needed to be as organic a process as possible, and not feel like an imposition, resembling another school assignment. Given the test and reference group variables, along with the differences in school and cultural background, it was important to give participants ample autonomy in their journaling experience to preempt any unintentional leading from the researcher while allowing for the most authentic student voice. What follows is an overview of initial observations that represent genuine student experience, untouched by any filters related to the research design.

At first glance, the student journals reveal some immediate impressions of students from Amsterdam and Bangkok. Ostensibly, the Thai students wrote frequent, lengthy entries — some accompanied with emojis and illustrations - in contrast to the international students from Amsterdam whose entries were often brief flows of thought. In general, the Thai students seemed to put more care into their penmanship and notebooks, whereas the Amsterdam students were not as scrupulous. All students appeared to engage freely with their journals, sharing candid thoughts about school, friends, teachers, and learning experiences. Their reflections about their hopes and fears were especially intriguing, as it appeared that more often than not, they chose to write in their journals during particularly stressful periods.

Students frequently recorded their thoughts during times of stress, prior to exam sessions or when their schedules indicated a clashing of several commitments. Overall, the Thai students provided more detailed descriptions of daily life as a student, with particular emphasis on their experience of learning. Outside a few exceptions, the Amsterdam students tended to write following the monthly reminder, or when they felt overwhelmed by the demands of school. Stress and anxiety were common themes that surfaced among all students, while the impact of hot weather seemed to be a recurrent topic for the Bangkok students. In the following chapters, I will feature four students, two test and two reference from each school, to elucidate their reflections of learning in greater detail. These exemplar cases were selected based on the quality of their reflections and in large part, their commitment to partaking fully in the study. In order to preserve complete anonymity, pseudonyms will be used for the four exemplar students.

5.4 Post-interviews

In the regular monthly email reminders about journal writing, a note about post interviews was sent to students in early fall 2018. Similar to the previous year, Amsterdam students met for post-interviews during their lunch hour or after school for approximately 30 to 40 minutes. The seven Amsterdam students who maintained their commitment to the study were pleased that they were able to complete the study and appeared grateful for the opportunity. Over the winter holidays, while the Bangkok school was still in session, I met with the ten student participants at the all girls' school to conduct the corresponding post-interviews, marking the end of the full year of data collection.

The same twenty-three questions were asked of all students, with the addition of a twenty-fourth question that explicitly inquired about any potential impact between mindfulness and learning. Every student was asked to sign a final consent form reminding them of the purpose of the research study and that in accordance with GDPR regulations, personal information would remain confidential. In the rare case where a student may have shared worrisome content that indicated any harm to self or others, the respective school authorities would be notified. Each student was thanked again for their participation and presented with a gift of appreciation.

5.5 Nuances in the Thai language

Following the analysis of data, it soon became apparent that the very nature of the Thai language would impact not only the interpretation of student experience of mindfulness and learning, but the manner in which they come to understand their lifeworlds. In comparison with the Amsterdam cohort, certain terms such as 'mind,' 'calm,' or 'awareness,' emerge time and again during both interviews and journal reflections. On the other hand, the Thai students' descriptions of experience offer multi-dimensional meanings not only to their understanding of mindfulness and learning, but more importantly, to the 'mind' in itself. These different cultural constructs of 'mind' offer insights into how students understand their experience of learning and further, how educators view student learning.

The following table showcases the range of English translations that closely approximate meaning to the Thai term. Thai terms such as 'samati' or 'sati' originally derive from Sanskrit text.

Figure 5. **Nuances in Thai language**

Thai	**English translations**
"jai"	'mind,' 'spirit,' 'will'
"samati"	'meditation,' 'mindful', 'mindfulness,' 'concentration,' 'focus'
"sati"	'sati,' 'consciousness,' 'mindfulness'
"jit jai jod jaw"	'focused mind'
"sati thaak"	'fractured mind'
"thang jai"	'concentrate,' 'to put forth intention,' 'to will'

“foong saan”	‘to be distracted’
“wok waak”	‘wobbly,’ ‘faltering,’ ‘distraught’
“sa-ngop”	‘calm’

The following chapters introduce four exemplar cases, providing a fuller narrative of the individual student experience. In the transcription of interviews and journal analyses, I found the differences in the students’ use of language to describe the mind and aspects of mindfulness to be significant. While words such as ‘student,’ ‘school,’ and ‘attention,’ had direct English-Thai translations, this was not the case for descriptors of mindfulness. The cultural constructs that emerge from original Sanskrit text into the Thai language reflect contrasting interpretations between student groups in both contexts.

Chapter 6: Joey - AMS test student (grade 10/11)

6.1 Overview of the chapter

This chapter provides a more in-depth illustration of one of the test students in Amsterdam. The pseudonym 'Joey' has been assigned to protect anonymity. This insider's look into Joey's year-long journey begins with the pre-interview that provides a general student profile and captures his initial thoughts on learning and mindfulness. Joey's reflection journal highlights insights shared over the course of the year that were relevant to the aims of this research study. The post-interview brings closure to Joey's reflection journey and ends with concluding insights on what he has learned about mindfulness and even more, himself as a learner.

6.2 Pre-interview

This exemplar test student from Amsterdam was chosen for his insights about his learning and impressions of mindfulness. Of the other students in the Amsterdam test group, Joey was a keen participant from the start. Between his interviews with me and his journal reflections, he was an ideal choice for a case study due to his consistent follow through and interest in the study.

6.2.1 Reflections on learning

Joey describes himself as a "creative procrastinator" who enjoys the sciences but tends to thrive in courses like film and art. He expresses that a good teacher, one who uses "interesting and creative ways to teach" helps him to learn. The learning environment itself is very important to Joey, where he notes:

'I think it is very important, for example if I have some friends over to do work, I get a lot less done than if I were working alone. I get the most and my best work done alone.'

His preference to work alone is an interesting observation. By unpacking how he learns and how he knows he has understood a concept, his answers consistently demonstrate a degree of self-reliance in his approach to learning, with occasional support from others:

'For math it's easy to know if you've learned something by solving equations...but for ideas and concepts it's harder; I feel I've learned it if I don't need to think about it or process it as much as I did before.'

'When I don't understand a concept or idea [I] go to a teacher or someone who knows, but if I'm being honest with myself I don't do that as much as I should…[I] usually keep to myself and practice...school has amazing resources and I need to use them more.'

In the classroom, Joey pays attention "mainly by taking very brief notes and keeping eye contact with the teacher and reading everything that they wrote." He speaks to the importance of one-on-one attention in order to remain on task:

'The best way for me is to focus on the teacher and listen. If I'm writing notes I might just hear one good phrase and not hear what else is being talked about. Sometimes [it's] hard to pay attention; I can be a daydreamer and it can be hard for me to focus. Looking at the teacher helps me tofocus.'

Joey's self-observation as an aural and visual learner demonstrates a degree of self-awareness about his needs as a student. In fact, when asked to associate words with the term 'learning,' Joey remarks, "school, practice, teaching, visual." His learning strategies include "practicing…integrating it into my daily life if possible." This suggests that Joey is both a visual and kinesthetic learner, who presumably thrives in a more hands-on approach to instruction.

6.2.2 Impressions of mindfulness

Prior to his participation in this study, Joey had no previous experience with meditation or mindfulness practice. When asked to associate words with the term 'mindfulness,' Joey notes, "knowing, awareness, good, thinking." His understanding of mindfulness is partially correct, though flecked with a few inaccuracies. Given his thoughts on learning, it is clear that he has a better understanding of himself as a student of the classroom as opposed to a student of mindfulness. He defines mindfulness as:

'Being self-aware but also aware of people around you and I feel like [it's] knowing how to change or adapt, um invert to something different when necessary.'

When asked about an experience of mindfulness, he provides an unclear response:

'I really...like people and that's why I like science so much…I like knowing and not knowing the answers to why we are here and all that crazy stuff...my experience of mindfulness is about how I've created friends, strengthened my relationships with family…'

Joey presents a curiosity for learning and his environment. He seems to associate mindfulness with social connections and, when considering its practice in the classroom, he remarks:

'I think if you're mindful when you're learning then there's more opportunity for you to learn and grasp what is being taught. Yeah, it's the way you perceive info and process it.'

This statement suggests that Joey has an assumption about mindfulness being concerned with thought and how we process our thinking. He also notes the importance of attention in learning, stating that:

'I think it's pretty important to pay attention even if I don't always do my best at that. It's definitely an important aspect…in order to focus and absorb all of it.'

Since Joey had no prior formal experience in mindfulness training, it is conceivable how his thoughts on the practice demonstrate a surface understanding. His reflection journal marks an evolving journey as he comes to grips with the experience of mindfulness through the formal training program.

6.2.3 Reflections on school experience

When asked how his learning experience could be improved, Joey states:

"It could be better with fewer distractions in the class…and learn to control procrastination more and be more organized."

It is noteworthy that Joey's self-reflection as a procrastinator has come up again; he is aware that this is something that he needs to address.

'I think that um, the more one-on-one time with the teacher can really help because if you teach all of the students in the same way it is more than likely that more than one will not grasp it, and it could just be the way it is being taught to them...more one-on-one time will help them to realize that.'

This statement sheds light on instructional best practice while demonstrating Joey's perceptiveness about his individual learning needs. At the same time, he is appreciative of the resources provided by the school:

'I think the school uses the resources that we have really well like google classroom, Veracross...that's a really big organizational factor that helps me…for example, [I] can see a teacher's Veracross page and see all the work that we've done.'

Overall, Joey is well acquainted with the school resources and how to access them. He is a reflective respondent as his answers indicate that he understands his role in improving his learning experience.

6.3 Joey's reflection journal

From his first entries, Joey presents impressions that are both objective and candid. He expresses his enthusiasm about partaking in the mindfulness sessions along with a conglomerate of emotions that include excitement, optimism, and anxiety. He describes some of the goals outlined through the MiSP curriculum and is determined to commit fully to the program but admits to some skepticism. It is the mere nature of high school that leads Joey to question the effectiveness of mindfulness practice:

'We determined our goals for this [program] and my main goals are to become more determined but also to be less scared of the future. With exams coming up I'm quite worried about how well I'll perform and next year I'm scared of not doing great in the IB and then comes university. It's something worth stressing a little about but it's a little overwhelming for me…I'm feeling optimistic as well as slightly worried because I think some of the things we are going to cover I'm a bit skeptical about.'

In time, Joey becomes less skeptical about mindfulness practice and appears to embrace some of the exercises:

'I had another meeting with Ms. H again the other day and I'm starting to enjoy this even more…we did an activity in which we were lying on the floor with a rubber duck on our belly and trying to breathe into it. It sounds a bit weird and it was a bit weird but I think it's a really good exercise that's really easy to do…I'm going to try to do an exercise similar to this in bed when I'm having trouble sleeping

and I'll see how I do. At this point I feel like I'm only slightly introducing mindfulness into my daily life. I've noticed that after sessions with Ms. H I feel more grateful which makes me happy. :)'

Joey's slightly changed perception about mindfulness practice is worth noting. While not explicit, he seems to find some of the mindfulness activities worthwhile and beneficial to his daily life. His reference to feelings of gratitude are of particular significance and demonstrates that he may find mindfulness practice enjoyable.

Throughout his mindfulness journey, Joey shares some of his learnings with his mother and aunt and find their encouragement helpful. He even leads them in a mindfulness exercise which was well received. He notes the objective of directing one's attention to the present and considers this a beneficial exercise both for himself and others:

'I lead [sic] her and my mum in a mindfulness exercise and they LOVED it. I was very inspired from when Ms. H lead [sic] us in it. The point of the exercise was to call attention to the present and living in the moment and this is exactly what I was looking for from this study. It really helps me to at least temporarily pull back from looking to [sic] far into the future with fear. Instead this helps me to see the world from here and now and this makes me really happy.'

It is evident that Joey finds mindfulness practice beneficial for relieving stress, particularly as it relates to future worries. As the group progresses through the MiSP curriculum, Joey continues to reflect upon applying theory to practice and how it may affect his life:

'We also had the exercise of controlling our 'puppy dog mind,' and it also sounds pretty weird but it's a really good skill to have I think. This is actually something that I've discovered I think I want to change a bit about myself. To be able to control my mind from going all of [sic] the place would be a very good skill to have and it's quite difficult for me at this point. But in summary, I'm increasingly optimistic about mindfulness and the effects are becoming clearer and clearer.'

The scheduled mindfulness sessions were set to end shortly before the start of final exams, so it was interesting to read Joey's reflections as he entered the exam period:

'It feels like they [exams] came up very fast but maybe that's good but I feel like it's from the fact that I'm less stuck up in the future and worrying about it. I did try a small mindfulness exercise before one of my exams and it did help I think, but I forgot to do it before another one. In terms of the effect of

doing a small breathing exercise before the exam, I feel like it didn't help me to remember the knowledge I needed for the exam, but it put me into a calmer and more relaxed state. I think that because I was calmer before my exam it in turn helped me to do well…I also tried the same exercise before a math test. To be honest, the hardest part of the exercise is doing it in public. It feels a bit weird but a lot of the time it is worth doing.'

In his latter reflections, especially once the school term ended, Joey indicates that he did not continue to practice his mindfulness exercises as often, if at all. Over the summer holiday, he notes, "I haven't really been applying my skills in mindfulness…even though I find them great exercises I just haven't really needed to do them." These final impressions, along with his insights throughout the year, indicate that Joey views mindfulness practice as a means for stress relief. It is interesting to observe his openness to the idea of mindfulness over time, but more for its potential calming effects.

6.4 Post-interview

A year later, Joey admitted to not having written as often as he would have liked to in his journal but felt his entries were a good representation of the past year. Joey was appreciative for the opportunity to partake in the study and the mindfulness program. Overall, he presented as reflective and realistic in his assessment of the year.

6.4.1 Reflections on learning

To describe himself, Joey still alludes to procrastination, but concurrently notes that he is capable:

'As a student, I'd say I am capable, definitely capable, um but a little lacking when it comes to motivation…but I will say that learning to be mindful has helped with my motivation, in at least a small amount of my work that I do, yeah.'

This comment is particularly interesting since it is in response to the very first question about how he would describe himself as a student. Joey clearly has taken some time to make some connections between how his experience in the mindfulness program may have impacted his learning experience in some way. When specifically probed about his learning needs, Joey comments again on the effectiveness of creative teaching strategies, noting, "obviously it's harder to teach that way but it helps me..." He provides a specific example from biology:

'When, just recently this year in biology, I started a new technique of learning which is the flipped classroom, it's not really my thing but it's required for the biology course, we learn it at home…the first test that we did was on cells and I actually aced it which was 12 out of 12…which I wasn't expecting cuz I normally can't study and learn independently; yeah cell bio, I was pretty surprised with it but I was able to learn um, the new information well.'

Joey demonstrates some improvement in his ability to learn independently, an observation that coincides with his self-efficacy as a learner:

'I think, I think I've learned something when I'm able to teach it to someone and that's normally [how] some of my learning and studying is when I can explain it to my mom or my sister or my dad at that point I feel like, especially if they ask questions and I'm able to answer it as well.'

In addition to this increased confidence in his capabilities as a learner, Joey demonstrates responsible decision-making in how he manages his studies:

'My phone and my computer are really big distractions, so what I do is, if I have studying to do…I'll do a bit of studying and then I'll go on my phone, and I have these intervals of study, play, study, play and that helps me to, at the moments when I am studying to be really studying instead of, cuz then it's back to the attention thing, cuz if I don't give enough of my attention it's harder for me to learn so I give all of my attention, then none of my attention.'

Thus, although Joey may occasionally struggle with procrastination, he has applied specific techniques that he has found helpful in managing both his attention and workload.

6.4.2 Impressions of mindfulness

During the post-interview, words that Joey associate with mindfulness include:

'Gratitude, present, as in joy, um, can I say mom? Like my mom? She, yeah she has taught yoga classes, yeah she's really into mindfulness so I was able to share some of this with her.'

His choice of words is of interest here; gratitude, [being] present, and joy are sentiments that coincide with reported feelings of equanimity. Joey's association with his mother is also noteworthy, as he links his mother with these positive aspects of mindfulness.

His interpretation of mindfulness is as follows:

'…Being mindful but being aware and able to control your mind but peacefully and in a relaxed way, it's I think for me as well, it's being able to see the bigger picture, zooming out rather than focusing on one thing…most of the time it's one thing that's bothering me, stressing me...being able to zoom out and solve it in a way, or being able to find solutions to solve it.'

'I think mindfulness practice is, it's being able to be aware of yourself and your emotions and to be able to control your mind but not in a forceful way but in a more calming and relaxing way, and it can really put you into a state of bliss in the, in the calmness of it, that's what it is for me.'

Joey's reflections here demonstrate a degree of understanding of mindfulness particularly as he mentions increased awareness and feelings of calm. His mention of being able to find solutions to stressors in his life is not in actual fact, the purpose of mindfulness practice. However, it can be argued that Joey's novice mindfulness practice has taught him a means to clear his mind which could potentially lead to an increased ability to problem solve.

When asked to elaborate on his experience of mindfulness, Joey shares:

'Well um, over the course, I think it kind of taught me to zoom out and see the bigger picture, it helped me learn and realize the good side to things that I didn't think had a good side. But also it taught me…kept myself in line in a way that I really had trouble with before.'

To a large extent, Joey views his mindfulness training experience as a positive one, having alluded to some of the benefits of the practice. Simultaneously, it can be deduced that there are aspects of mindfulness that he remains unclear about, given some of his hazy responses about his experience.

6.4.3 Reflections on school experience

Joey feels that he understands a topic when he is able to explain it to others, stating:

'If I can teach it to someone, but it's further than that, if it's a difficult concept it's being able to teach it to someone and being able to answer their questions they have on it; I think if you really understand a difficult concept it could connect to other concepts that you also understand…then it's something you've really grasped.'

A year later, Joey continues to find the school's resources sufficient and helpful:

'I think well it is again all the resources that we have, not sure if it counts as strategies but being able to provide us with all the different resources that we need, online books and google classroom, Veracross, email to communicate with our teachers…'

When asked how his learning experience could be improved, Joey shares:

'I think right now, I'm really happy with my learning experience in terms of school, but I think for it to be better it would be for me to figure out my own solutions to problems that I face instead of being really reliant on all my friends and my family and peers and stuff like that.'

A year later, Joey comes across as an independent learner, a student who strives to understand on his own while knowing how to tap school resources as needed.

6.5 Summary

Joey's self-awareness as a "creative procrastinator" is an identifier that could probably be associated with most adolescents his age. His view of himself as a learner evolves slightly over time. He knows he learns best when he is able to curb his focus by listening closely to the teacher and limiting any distractions. Perhaps through a combination of his own experience and employing some mindfulness techniques, Joey demonstrates increased ownership and independence in his learning by year's end.

In regard to mindfulness, it is interesting to observe how his perception develops and is more sophisticated as he becomes acquainted with the phenomenon. His curiosity about mindfulness is one of the reasons he agrees to be a study participant, but he begins his journey with a degree of skepticism. His optimistic outlook helps him to embrace the mindfulness program with an open mind and throughout the year he develops an

appreciation for the practice. It is not explicitly discernible how mindfulness has impacted Joey's learning experience but he says it has helped with his motivation. As a result, it seems that over the year he has begun to employ new strategies to help him with learning. Furthermore, he reports increased feelings of equanimity and views mindfulness as a helpful practice to decrease stress and improve one's perspective.

Particularly during highly stressful periods or when faced with daunting aspects of school, Joey views mindfulness as a good source for stress relief. Mindfulness is not a daily part of his life however because during non-stressful periods such as the summer holiday, Joey does not practice mindfulness techniques because he does not see the need. Joey's reflections indicate no real impact on knowledge retention right before an exam but rather, as indicated in his post interview, "I think it did help with allowing me to focus better with my attention to my learning." This awareness is of particular importance to this study since it can be inferred that learning requires attention. If mindfulness practice gives rise to increased attention, then optimal learning can take place.

Chapter 7: Rika - AMS reference student (grade 9/10)

7.1 Overview of the chapter

This chapter illustrates the reflection journey of a reference student in Amsterdam. The pre-interview introduces the student's open and honest account of her character and learning style. Nicknamed, 'Rika,' this student demonstrates consistent engagement throughout the research study as seen through her impressions during the interviews and reflection journal. She demonstrates a marked interest in adolescent mental health as she makes frequent connections between wellness and individual learning styles. Rika shares openly about her own struggles with attention and stresses the importance of teachers possessing a comprehensive understanding of the learning needs of their students.

7.2 Pre-interview

Rika was chosen as a case study from the Amsterdam group due to her extensive account of her experience of learning as well as her musings about the teenage mind. Due to her own personal interests in psychology, she was an eager participant from the start of this study. She understood the research aims of exploring student experience of learning and wanted to contribute to this effort.

7.2.1 Reflections on learning

Rika describes herself as "creative, curious, and open-minded," someone who thrives in the arts and enjoys classes like drama and physical education. When asked about a conducive learning environment, Rika states:

'Uh, well to be able to focus well I need to have a room that's completely empty like I can't have lots of distractions, and I also need music like a good background noise.'

She admits to having trouble with attention and finds it difficult to focus on tasks for long periods at a time:

'Honestly I can't, but if I really, if I know it's super important that I need it in the future I'll probably have a stress ball or something that I can fidget on cuz I need to fidget, or I will sit on the ground or something.'

It is evident that Rika has a good sense of what does and does not work for her as a student. She does not like to be still for long and admits that in order to learn, she would "need breaks to move around." As for preferred teaching styles, Rika shares:

'If teachers give me examples that I can work off of and they give me assignments that I can do step by step…and understand my perspective as well like how I can learn…for me time is important that I have a lot of time and if I have a question I should feel comfortable asking.'

It is interesting that not only is Rika aware of what works best for her as a learner, but she feels it is equally important that teachers are aware. Furthermore, when she does not understand a topic, Rika states:

'Well it depends on subjects I guess, I like ignore it cuz I don't like asking for help but then it blows up in my face so then I have to ask for help.'

Learning does not come easily to Rika. Words that she associates with learning include "stressful, time management, [and] lots of different strategies." She knows that she has understood a difficult concept when she "doesn't worry about it anymore." Still, Rika has experienced success in learning as evidenced by the following:

'If someone asks me, someone who does not know anything about the topic and if I can give a good explanation and they understand.'

Rika presents a realistic picture of how she copes with difficulties with attention. She is a conscientious student, as demonstrated by her tendency to apply different learning strategies. Her account of stress as a student also speaks to some of the challenges involved in learning difficult material while managing her demanding workload.

7.2.2 Impressions of mindfulness

Prior to partaking in this research study, Rika had not experienced any formal mindfulness training. To her, mindfulness connotes the following words:

'quiet, um peace, I don't know…uh concentration…'

Rika is intrigued by the idea of mindfulness, but supplies her own definition of the phenomenon. She views mindfulness as a means of focusing on the self, but through activities that she finds enjoyable. Her view of mindfulness is as follows:

'For me mindfulness isn't like mindfulness, my mindfulness is sports so that is when I can actually like, be mindful.'

'Um pausing time, for me, it feels like you are the only one on earth I guess and you have that time to think about bad stuff or good stuff and it is time for yourself to be you and to be ok.'

'Well if we talk about like sitting down and being quiet or trying like normal mindfulness or not great yeah, cuz that's not my way of being mindful but um...it's relaxing, um probably just happy I'm just happy like my choice of what I'm doing, it's like my time doing what I like.'

At one point, Rika uses swimming as an example of mindfulness as well. She seems to have a degree of understanding about mindfulness when it comes to focusing one's energy on the self, but her overall impression of mindfulness is not in line with the literature.

7.2.3 Reflections on school experience

Rika seems pleased with the school's resources. She shares that the block scheduling system works well, students can receive extensions on work if needed, and she attests to an understanding faculty. Regarding specific strategies that she finds useful, Rika states:

'I like to connect with the teacher or whoever is teaching me which, I want them to understand me even if it's not like at a deep level.'

Furthermore, she believes her learning could be improved by the following:

'More creativity involved and more understanding of different things about the student cuz every student has difficulties and I know I have difficulties and I think that it's important that the teachers know and accept us as we are, and have to know that we can't, we might not respond to that learning method of theirs so they have to like understand that and accept that.'

Rika's honest responses about her learning experience reflect how important individual attention is for her own growth. She also has a strong voice that speaks on behalf of her classmates as well when vouching for differentiated instruction. She is developing her own self-awareness as a learner and appreciates the uniqueness of her own learning style. The emphasis she places on teachers "knowing and accepting students as they are," shows how important it is for teachers to understand her as an individual and as a student.

7.3 Rika's reflection journal

Rika's journal reflections serve as a palpable window into a young person's thinking. Her writing covers direct classroom experiences and reads easily as if following her train of thought. She provides a forthright description of learning that could presumably represent the experience of many adolescents:

'It doesn't matter which subject, but every teacher !must! [sic] know that if a student is looking out the window, it is most likely that the things going through their head isn't about the class. I know this trick pretty well myself, because well, I've been caught not paying attention many times. It's not fair though! We are all teenagers, which means our brain is all over the place. Today as I was working on my laptop and [sic] suddenly wondered how many thoughts actually go through our heads daily.'

Rika writes extensively about her thoughts on teens and their attention span and even researches that "humans had [sic] between 50,000-70,000 thoughts per day." This revelation leads her to contemplate the 35-48 thoughts per minutes that seemingly flow through young people's minds. This knowledge, coupled with Rika's interest in psychology and mental illness, lead to extensive entries about how teen mental health

can have a direct impact on student attention and learning. She shares her worries about peers in general who struggle with their well-being and considers how her support of her friends also impacts her own attention and learning:

'The worse he/she got the more I got worried and gave myself to them as much as possible to help. We got the school involved. That was the first time I took action and got adults involved. The [sic] moment I couldn't even hear what the teacher was saying because the voices in my head [sic] blocking the passage of sound with stress about this one person. Mental illness is a heavy subject…little do teachers know that whilst they scream at you for poor time management and not taking their class seriously, that bad thoughts went through your head that was caused by mental health…it is an unrealistic expectations [sic] that most adults hold upon students. How can I keep my focus on a long page of writings [sic] when there's color and action going on out there?'

Rika's account of teenage stress provides the reader with a realistic visual of the typical high school experience.

In fact, of all the Amsterdam student participants, Rika's writing offers the most fluid impression of an adolescent's experience of learning amidst periods of stress and uncertainty. Despite not having participated in any formal mindfulness program, Rika has a general understanding of what it is based on her knowledge of yoga and trends in well-being and psychology. In one of her entries, as she reflects on her first year in high school, she describes "a tension building between the teacher and the students" and describes her experience of new classes like a "wave of stress we were about to feel in the upcoming few years." Rika describes her unique means of coping with her feelings:

'As I listened to my teachers and the responsibility I had as a student in 9th grade [sic]…as my anxiety was catching up to me I managed to calm myself down. My technique, in situations like this, is to imagine myself on a boat at night, laying outside staring at the pitch black sky filled with little lamp-like stars. That image in my head always seems to act like my meditation for moments when I feel like throwing my school books accross [sic] the classroom. Thankfully, my method of relaxing works. I remind myself that it won't be thaaat [sic] bad.'

As the school year continues, Rika proceeds to reflect on observations about her learning while commenting on the day-to-day high school experience.

By 10th grade, Rika provides a different take on high school:

'…I've realized that I can easily accept that there's no getting away from school. Even faking being sick won't get you away from that one science test. It will haunt you, until you complete it. But for some reason, the promise I made to myself about keeping up my grades and homework has actually affected me in a good way. Without creating excuses, I did all my work and have used my time sufficiently. I motivated myself to do better. Even though I still think that the things motivating you should be your grades, there should be an ***inner will*** *to learn and get better. Isn't that what being human is all about anyways [sic]. You should be curious. We all have the chance to learn and ask questions freely without judgement, let's take advantage of it.'*

Her stance on her approach to learning reflects an overall positive outlook on her school experience. While there are numerous entries that detail discouraging moments in school, Rika's pondering on one's *inner will* gives rise to the idea that one can press on with learning through deliberate, exerted effort, regardless of mindfulness expertise. Whether this entails a divergence or convergence of definitions is hard to tell.

Being mindful, tapping into one's inner will, or demonstrating 'grit,' defined as "passion and perseverance for long-term goals" (Duckworth and Eskreis-Winkler 2015: 397) could all represent various constructs conducive for individual achievement. While Duckworth and Gross (2014: 321) argue that self-control and grit have overlapping qualities due to their hierarchical goal framework, there are clear distinctions that lie in the nature of overcoming impulses versus attributing sustained effort over time. Rika's mention of inner will resonates with these constructs that, like mindfulness, share a common ground in the strength of individual perseverance.

7.4 Post-interview

One year later, Rika continues to express her views with assurance. Rika stands out from the reference group due to her strong voice regarding what she finds beneficial both for her own learning as well as all young people. She is strong-willed in that she likes to operate in her own way. For instance, for her reflection journal, she opted not to use the one provided because it was lined; she preferred one that was unlined so selected a separate journal herself for the year-long reflection.

7.4.1 Reflections on learning

In the post-interview, Rika is actively engaged. An immediate observation is how communicative she is throughout the post-interview. She describes herself as follows:

'As a student, I'm a pretty visual learner and I like to kinda do it myself and see if I have something wrong and I'll see like later if I can fix it, um I have to practice until I get it right I can't really memorize anything, I have to know it to be able to actually do it and apply it to my work…and I need a lot of time to complete my work, depending on what it is obviously, but usually I just need my own time like my own ways, listening to music or like being in a quiet room with candles and stuff so that I can actually be able to complete it.'

Rika is aware of her needs as a student and expands on the importance of the learning environment:

'…It has to be completely silent, or a lot of people moving around so that's why I like to work at cafes sometimes, to see people move around and do their work too, or else a silent room without any clock noises or clicking of pens or anything because then I get really distracted, and I work best if I'm working in groups or pairs with my friends that I'm comfortable with asking stupid questions, for example, knowing that I won't get judged if I do ask them.'

Rika had mentioned in the pre-interview that focusing her attention could be challenging at times, and she communicates again, the need to employ different strategies in order to manage her wavering attention span:

'I'm a person who fidgets a lot and like moves around a lot…we worked on presenting skills this year a lot and she [the teacher] kind of gave us the choice to pick whichever topic we wanted to pick usually, and so I think that helped me kind of stay still more and actually focus on saying whatever I wanted to say…but, um I fidget a lot, like with my feet, or I just play with an elastic or I have a bracelet that I always play with usually, or to get myself to focus before or like during a test, even though it's kind of bad, I write like about anything that's on my mind so I get that out of the way, so I don't get distracted by my thoughts, like it doesn't always have to be physical or hyperactivity in my brain that I get really distracted.'

In fact, when asked specifically what she needed to learn, Rika states:

'Time, like I said before, and, I dunno, like things? Or just like...yeah, probably time, most important for me and just, not questioning my ways of learning, I guess because sometimes I need to sit on the floor and listen to music which most teachers don't really understand I guess, which I mean it's scientifically proven it's not the best thing for you to focus but sometimes it is for me personally.'

While Rika seems to understand the makings of a more conventional classroom experience she is unafraid to point out what does not work for her and, more importantly, what does.

7.4.2 Impressions of mindfulness

Similar to her thoughts on personalized learning, Rika believes that the experience of mindfulness depends on the individual. Her thoughts on mindfulness during the pre-interview flitted from feeling peaceful to focus on the self to simply doing what one wanted. A year later, her impressions are slightly more defined:

'…not like peace and quiet, I don't know why, yeah but mindfulness for everyone is different I think, for me it's doing the things I love and being aware of what I'm doing at all times, and even if that's in a busy or chaotic situation, I'll know, I mean I think that's called being mindful.'

Despite not having participated in a formal mindfulness program in the past year, Rika offers a comprehensive definition of the phenomenon, one that is more accurate than her initial thoughts. It can be presumed that Rika has picked up new knowledge over the course of the study because although she attests to not having done any formal mindfulness training, she shares:

'My best friend has taught me some [tips], like things that I can do really quickly.'

When asked to describe what mindfulness looks like, Rika adds:

'Well it depends on the person, the typical mindfulness is kind of breathing in and out, and that helps you focus in on what you're doing more which makes you more mindful of everything around you, um but of course it depends on everyone, like maybe sports gives you that mindfulness and

that awareness, or playing an instrument, or singing or something like that, or writing, or an activity…before it was probably doing yoga or...but now I think it's simpler than that, it's just kind of stopping, not even breathing, just stopping and trying to not think of anything, and breathing in that helps..'

Even more, Rika defines mindfulness as:

'…um, being in control...of yourself, not anything else, just of yourself and your actions'

Based on her responses, Rika has developed a deeper understanding of what mindfulness is and how its impact can vary for individuals.

7.4.3 Reflections on school experience

Rika's impressions about her school experience have not changed significantly since the pre-interview. She continues to view learning as a very individualized experience and believes instruction should be differentiated since students have unique learning styles. She views good learning as:

'Everyone probably learning in their own pace and the teacher, or whoever is teaching not putting everyone in the same category and like, it's not like everybody learns the same way.'

She associates the concept of learning with:

'…probably experiences, like, I learn best from experiences and mistakes and other people's mistakes of course.'

In order to know whether she has learned a new concept, she shares:

'I'll probably remember it, if it's mentioned to me again, or if I see something in real life I can kind of think of it because I know it and I didn't memorize it, I guess, I can usually apply it to my own life…maybe if I can explain it to my friends, even if it's all over the place if they understand the main part.'

Based on Rika's account of her own learning style resulting from her wavering attention span, she challenges some presumptions about classroom instruction:

'I think if maybe the teachers and everyone was more aware of each individual and their needs like if they knew more about mental illness and stuff, that would really help, not only me but a lot of people in the school, it's kind of a taboo topic so I don't think that that's spoken about.'

Rika unabashedly speaks openly about her occasional need to fidget as a means to stay focused so throughout the post-interview there is a sense that she seeks increased sensitivity from teachers to better understand her as a learner.

7.5 Summary

Rika voices her needs as a learner along with her advocacy for others in the classroom both in the interviews and her reflection journal. From the beginning, she does not shy away from the fact that she struggles with attention and needs to employ different strategies to help with focus. While this effort is something she acknowledges as part of her learning needs, Rika also emphasizes the importance of the teacher role in supporting students as individual learners.

In her post interview, when asked whether she felt mindfulness may have an impact on learning, Rika shared, "Well I never actually participated in a program, but just for myself like before a presentation [sic] breathing in and out really helps because it really does calm me down." Thus, despite not having participated in any formalized mindfulness training, Rika attests to benefits of focused breathing, a fundamental component of mindfulness practice. In general, Rika holds a different stance on mindfulness and views it as a varying construct for individuals. Her impression and understanding of mindfulness become more sophisticated by the end of the year. She has a keen interest in psychology, so whether her enhanced knowledge is from peers or from her own readings is uncertain.

What is evident is Rika's fervent interest in adolescent psychology. Her reflections on adolescent mental health and the impact on learning are informative. Her writing reads of a certain urgency for school practitioners to seek a better understanding of the

adolescent experience in order to address how affected young people are by stress and anxiety. She argues that there is unmistakable impact between adolescent mental health and their ability to learn. Nonetheless, she ends her self-reflections with a hopeful stance about education. Despite not having practiced mindfulness in any formal capacity, she has a compelling conviction about the role of one's inner will to persevere in learning.

Chapter 8: Leela - BKK test student (equivalent grade 10/11)

8.1 Overview of the chapter

This chapter introduces the reflection journey of an exemplar test student from Bangkok, nicknamed Leela, to maintain anonymity. The impressions that she shares through the interviews, coupled with her journal reflections depicts her everyday musings about her life as a student. She shares thoughts about the uncertainty of her future and contemplates her academic successes and struggles. In view of the unexpected turn of events regarding the school not running the mindfulness training for her grade level, Leela was still a solid test student due to her commitment to regular mindfulness practice in her daily life.

8.2 Pre-interview

In Thai, the word 'leela' broadly translates to 'play' or 'pizazz.' This pseudonym is aptly chosen for this test student who, both in person and in writing, presents a certain gusto. Leela was selected as an exemplar test student due the quality of her reflections and compelling voice. She writes in English for the first three months, but by April switches to Thai in order to more accurately portray her thoughts. Her thoughts are free flowing and unadulterated, written in casual Thai with occasional Japanese phrases (as she is learning the language).

8.2.1 Reflections on learning

When asked to describe herself as a student, Leela offers the following:

'I think I'm a person who is thoughtful and hardworking; when I do something, I want to make sure I do it well, I think I'm a person who can be moody [but] that depends on the situation...if things aren't going well I'm stressed, but if they go well I'm happy…I don't like distractions when I'm trying to learn.'

Leela is also an active young person and shares that physical education is her favorite subject. She enjoys the school's Sports Day because she enjoys playing a variety of sports. She finds that staying involved helps her to make connections and new friends. She defines learning itself as:

'…the ability to pay attention'

Elaborating on how she pays attention, Leela shares:

'I give a lot of attention to my friends; if we don't pay attention in class some teachers will make us practice sitting meditation, some teachers are really strict and make us do jumping jacks if we're late.'

While she presents as an active and sociable young person, it seems that Leela is heedful of teacher expectations and authority. A deep regard of teachers continues to emerge throughout her responses. Based on our exchanges, I gather that teachers are viewed as experts in their field and adults in the position of delivering knowledge - deserving of respect and gratitude.

Reflecting on what good learning looks like, Leela shares:

'One teacher teaches us that we are constantly learners not just in the classroom but throughout our daily lives.'

Furthermore, Leela knows she has learned something when:

'…the teacher asks the question again and I can answer then I know I've learned it.'

Leela is forthright in her responses. She cares about learning and achieving. She thrives in a structured environment with clear expectations but finds physical activity a healthy release for both her mental and social energy.

8.2.2 Impressions of mindfulness

From the start, Leela provides sound understanding of mindfulness both in theory and practice. There is no hesitation in her answers other than the need to elaborate further on specific facets of the experience. To Leela, mindfulness equates to "sitting meditation." This is the image that immediately comes to her mind in a word

association. In the past, Leela shares that one of her teachers used to have students practice sitting meditation before instruction. She also went on a camping trip once where participants engaged in various forms of meditation, like sitting and walking. Due to some positive experiences, Leela enjoys practicing meditation on her own time, quite regularly. She defines mindfulness as:

'It means being with yourself, awareness of where you are and what you are doing.'

Asked to elaborate on her experience of mindfulness, Leela shares:

'Normally it is practicing sitting meditation; I often am carried away by all kinds of thoughts so I have to bring myself back to the present; I often do this before examination time; sometimes I will meditate when I feel like I can't understand or concentrate on a certain subject; it helps to bring my focus back.'

'Normally I will do sitting meditation because it will help me to focus and allow me to read and learn more effectively.'

Leela's initial impressions of mindfulness are well-developed. She believes in the value of meditation practice and notices direct benefits to her studies:

'There are a lot of benefits; when I am mindful I can receive what the teacher is saying and focus on the act of learning. [Says to self] "I am learning here, and not learning there." I need to stay in the moment.'

On the topic of attention, she adds:

'There is a lot of importance because then there is purpose in learning; otherwise we direct our attention to other things like friends, etc.'

Through her responses, Leela acknowledges the role of attention in learning. This attention or focus is experienced when one is mindful, a phenomenon that can be achieved through meditation and awareness of the present moment.

8.2.3 Reflections on school experience

Like most students her age, Leela is concerned that she is still uncertain about her future career plans. When asked what she needed to learn, Leela's response was slightly off mark:

'Right now, what I need is to know what I want to do with my future; I still am unsure about what I want to do in the future.'

It is understandable that her future plans are of primary concern, but in the meantime, Leela focuses on what she does know, which is to put forth her best effort in school. She believes that teaching style has a lot of impact on her learning and remarks:

'For me I'm not a quick learner but if the teacher takes their time with instruction it helps me to learn; I also like hands on activities; when I see what I am learning it is easier to understand… if the teacher is strict it can be hard to learn; if there is joy in teaching then there is joy in learning.'

Leela is also resourceful as a student and shares that when she does not understand something:

'Normally I will think first, or ask friends, or the teacher…if friends help that can be enough.'

When grappling with difficult concepts, Leela talks about the importance of practicing and persisting through problems. She speaks of the school's efforts in peer tutoring and has accessed further enrichment outside of school to reinforce her learning. Generally, when reflecting on her main learning strategy, Leela remarks:

'I need to review and, in the classroom, I have to pay attention and practice.'

Throughout the pre-interview, Leela presents as an independent student who takes ownership of her learning. She has her teachers and friends for support, but overall, she holds herself accountable for accessing the most she can out of the classroom learning by paying attention. Leela is one to help herself first before asking others for assistance.

8.3 Leela's reflection journal

In her journal, Leela writes in an informal tense and employs playful language to express herself. She even uses expletives occasionally, when expressing particular frustration or disappointment. Her casual tone presents a certain vulnerability and trust in the reflection process.

Similar to her interviews, Leela describes how much she enjoys P.E. and physical activity. She enjoys learning Japanese, but in person she describes the importance of staying active due to her active mind. In retrospect, her journal musings are rather significant in this regard because she mentions quite often how her attention, or lack thereof, has a direct impact on her learning. She views tiredness and her cell phone top distractors to her learning:

'I'm so tired today. The academic schedule is packed everyday with no breaks. I really need to rest to regain energy…Today I am still not done studying mathematics. I reviewed math on the computer to understand what was taught better. It takes tremendous patience and persistence because there are distractions pulling me away constantly like my phone, sleepiness.'

While the other student participants also mention tiredness in their journals as a result of extreme heat in Bangkok, academic workload or intense weekly schedules, Leela makes a point of acknowledging how this constant fatigue directly impacts her ability to learn. She also admits to being constantly distracted by her phone to the extent of describing it as a 'phone addiction':

'After three days of studying mathematics for five hours each day, I've been confronted with the affliction of sleepiness. And phone addiction. See, these days I've been sleeping quite late which has weakened my body…sleepy! So, when it's time to learn I fall asleep. As for my phone addiction, it's due to checking tweets. My favorite band GFriend is working on their Comeback [album] so my mind has been focused on this rather than learning which has led to learning without understanding. Also, I haven't been reviewing as much. This is a very negative aspect of me at the moment.'

More often than not, when Leela writes about her adolescent struggles; she will include thoughts on turning to meditation in order to regain balance.

Over the course of the year, Leela elaborates on her meditation practice and ponders the influence of mindfulness on her life, reflecting both depth and breadth of understanding of the practice:

'Recently I have been so bored. Bored with everything. I am trying to find a way out for my life. Otherwise I won't have inspiration to keep learning…yesterday I did my sitting meditation so today my mind feels more open…feeling very OK.'

'Today my teacher has scheduled my test in economics, and well yesterday I meant to study but accidentally fell asleep and when I woke up it was morning. My mood at that moment was like, "What do I do?" So flustered, my mind was fractured. So, I decided to gather all of my concentration, told myself to remain calm, so I was able to become more mindful and thought, "I need to be calm and think about what I need to do at this moment. So I began to read. Studied as much as I possibly could. But I simply must have gotten lucky because…the teacher didn't test! I was so happy. Today's positive lesson is: I must set my mind to focus, calm my mind. When the mind is still I am able to think more clearly than when it is fractured.'

'Today was the day I had to present on my program for the second time. I tried to remember as much material as I could but when I presented it didn't quite go as planned. I got rather flustered. Plus, I even forgot some content. I need to go back to my mindfulness practice.'

'This week has been about reading and preparing for exams. I've needed to practice sitting meditation 5-10 minutes before each study session. I feel that I have a more focused mind when I read. Not distracted. Makes for better quality of reading/studying.'

'OMG today I almost died because of physics, chemistry, all at once, both classwork and individual work and group work…so much work! No time for anything - so irritating! But right now, I have problems with learning again in that I'm bored, don't want to learn; when it's time to concentrate, I fall asleep…huh- life. When I'm learning my mind likes to wander, thinking about this, that and the other thing, so then I can't understand what I'm learning. The truth is that I don't have a focused mind. I need to find inspiration in my learning and practice mindfulness to avoid distractions. I am going to make it - yeah!'

Throughout the year, Leela's entries continue to reflect both successes and failures while depicting a resilient outlook to school and life.

The nature of Leela's voice comes across as honest and reflective. There are several entries where she accounts for the difficulties of being a student in Bangkok, repressed by the country's prescriptive curriculum and a culture of intense competition for university placement. But her self-efficacy skills, internal locus of control, and ability to re-focus her mind help her to stay on course. One of her journal entries reflect how her self-awareness can affect learning:

'Today I've started to learn with greater intention. Like not getting distracted by other things, not playing with the phone, and placing more focus on my studies. As it turns out, learning can actually be fun. I didn't fall asleep. It made me understand that in anything I choose to do I need to put forth mindful intention and good things will follow.'

It is evident that Leela believes in the value of meditation and mindfulness practice, which she finds helpful both for school and life in general. Her view of mindfulness as expressed in the post-interview is compelling. Her understanding of mindfulness as a means to carry oneself and live with purpose is reflected in her writing. Despite the ups and downs of school and adolescence, Leela returns to meditation to regain mindfulness in order to attend to the next life task.

8.4 Post-interview

By year's end, Leela continues to present herself as a student who is very active, with diverse areas of interest. She enjoys being busy and particularly likes engaging in sports and physical activities. Yet, Leela explicitly states the importance of prioritizing her schoolwork and emphasizes the pressure she experiences to perform well. Throughout the conversation, it is evident that mindfulness plays a principal role in her daily life.

8.4.1 Reflections on learning

Asked to describe herself a second time since our last meeting in December 2017, Leela takes a moment to clarify the question:

'…Like, personality? I'd say I'm a person who is serious with my work, I want to finish my work before play, I don't like to work and play at the same time because that takes longer and it disrupts concentration/mindfulness; also I'm a student who likes to do lots of activities, so I'm a person who is conscientious, a bit of a perfectionist, if my grades slip, I can't let that happen.'

Leela still finds physical education her favorite subject due to the opportunity to move and exert energy. When reflecting on how she learns, Leela lists the following:

'1. Need to review what was learned, 2. Need to study theory, and 3. Need to pay attention in class or during tutoring; these 3 should do it.'

In her view, learning is not limited to the classroom:

'I don't think there is an end to learning; because you don't have to learn only in the classroom, there is so much you can learn from the internet. It is up to you whether you want to gain further knowledge and look it up, research it, so I don't think there is an end to learning.'

When learning new concepts, Leela employs specific strategies to guide her thinking:

'For example, if I'm going to make a 'mind map' then I will first think about it… I need to read all the material first and figure out what needs to be included, then I need to figure out what I can fit into the sheet of paper, once I've completed it, then I know I've been successful.'

Furthermore, Leela is able to gauge whether or not she has acquired new knowledge:

'How do I know? From my ability to recall better each time; if I learned something new, I would be conscious of having learned something new, and if I can apply it to real experiences or in other worksheets that means I can expand on what I've learned.'

Based on her answers, Leela is very self-aware of her high energy and recognizes the importance of physical exercise for a balanced lifestyle. At the same time, she believes in prioritizing her academics and demonstrates clear demarcations between work and play. In so doing, she has a defined sense of herself as a learner. Leela owns her

learning and employs strategies to expand on and strengthen her skills to ensure retention.

8.4.2 Impressions of mindfulness

Leela's understanding of mindfulness is deep-rooted. Her word association for mindfulness is as follows:

'[It is] a means of carrying out your life; if you are mindful you can live life well, if you live with mindfulness, speak mindfully, think mindfully, you can live with purpose.'

As previously mentioned, the students chosen for the test group in Bangkok consisted of those who engaged in mindfulness practice independently at home or as needed. This was certainly the case for Leela who shares that in addition to the weekly meditation sessions set by the school, she turned to meditation at home:

'Sometimes at home when I feel like my mind is not still, like if I'm reading and feel like my mind is not with me, I would sit for 10-15 minutes before studying.'

When asked what mindfulness looks like, Leela uses the present experience as an example:

'It means the ability to be with yourself in the present at all times, like right now I am interviewing with Kru [Teacher] June so I need to be focused on the interview and not floating away thinking about what I want to eat.'

Leela's understanding of mindfulness goes beyond textbook definition. She uses the Sanskrit term 'sati' in her definition, and states:

'Sati means being in the present.'

'For me I like to practice prior to reading or studying because it will help me to remain more focused on the material for a long time, because for example, most kids don't like to be still and study because when you read for a while it's boring, so I need to practice sitting meditation first so it will allow me to read for a long time and not be distracted towards other things.'

In relation to learning, Leela shares how mindfulness can have impact:

'I think that it will help us to better understand the learning material because you won't be more distracted to get off task to unrelated things, you can focus better on what you're learning; you will be focused on learning in the moment and receptive to what it means and to each step involved in the process.'

Her assessment of the relationship between mindfulness and learning is rudimentary at first, but then develops into a more evolved reflection:

'It is very important because if you are not paying attention then you don't know what you have learned, what were the steps towards understanding it, where it came from, you wouldn't understand any aspect of the process of learning.'

'I meditate whenever I am about to study because it helps me to avoid distractions and allows me to study for long periods, it allows me to not focus on anything else besides what I'm studying and I can absorb the material better.'

Leela's thoughts on the effects of mindfulness on her learning take a sequential form. She acknowledges the importance of paying attention in order to engage with instruction. In order to achieve and maintain her attention, she turns to meditation to enable prolonged focus on the material she is trying to learn. By doing so, she finds that she is better able to absorb the curriculum.

8.4.3 Reflections on school experience

In a year's time, Leela demonstrates increased ownership of her learning. Back in December 2017 Leela described the importance of a teacher taking the time during instruction to ensure student understanding. There seemed to be a lot of onus placed on the teacher providing visuals and hands-on activities to aid student learning. By December 2018, Leela's reflections reveal growth in her thinking. She indicates in various responses how she owns her learning and even more, how the onus to obtain knowledge and master understanding of material sits with her.

For instance, when asked about the importance of a teacher's style of instruction, Leela states:

'Well, firstly a good explanation is needed followed by application, because if we can apply it ourselves then we know whether we really understand it.'

Leela still presents as a very active student and admits that she struggles with attention when she finds the material boring or the teacher too repetitive. Still, she maintains similar approaches to learning that she described a year ago:

'Well I would ask the teacher or friends, and if I still don't understand, I would search YouTube, or from previous tutoring I would revisit past tutoring materials.'

Mastery of more difficult concepts would require more conventional strategies:

'Uh, with formula or theory, if I can explain or apply a formula that means I understand it…if I am stuck on a theory or formula, like if I cannot apply the formula that means I don't quite understand it yet or maybe I made a minor error or something or misinterpretedsomething.'

Regarding the school's instructional support, Leela mentions the formal meditation practice that has begun for the younger student cohort as well as the whole school weekly meditation practice. She believes that the school has incorporated these initiatives as means to support student learning. Additionally, increased technology has contributed to a more interactive classroom environment:

'Now our teachers have enhanced their teaching, where they use iPads in addition to slideshows so there's more color and engagement so students do not get bored.'

Asked what strategies she uses to aid her understanding, Leela shares:

'To help me learn? Well, 1. I need to pay attention while learning. 2. Once I've learned something it is necessary to review because if you don't review it you may forget. 3. It is important to find further enrichment to the lesson in order to expand on the knowledge.'

Overall, Leela comes across as a resourceful student who draws upon a number of strategies to support her learning. She is unafraid to ask questions of her teachers and peers and is able to access further enrichment outside of the classroom. Most notably, is how her experience of learning repeatedly reflects herself at the forefront. She believes the school's investment in meditation practice, like her meditation self-practice, reflect an association to learning. As noted in her concluding thoughts in the post-interview, Leela shares that her ability to learn begins with the ability to pay attention.

8.5 Summary

Leela's candor shines through both in person and in writing. From our first meeting, there was no pretense or desire to impress me as a visiting researcher. As a test student in the Bangkok cohort, Leela represented students who engaged in regular meditation practice. Her individual practice is a means of anchoring her active mind, as she admits to being a particularly active individual.

In order to learn, Leela is aware of the need to employ focused attention. She believes that attention is a requirement for learning, but admits to occasional struggles with concentration due to various distractions. She believes that learning is an all-encompassing experience, one that is not limited to the classroom but extends to daily life and has no bounds. Leela views technology as an aid to learning as she mentions the use of iPads in classroom instruction and often refers to the internet for further enrichment, such as YouTube instructional videos.

However, Leela also admits that technology can be a hindrance and divulges that the phone may be a main culprit that distracts her from her studies. The phone, use of social media, Bangkok heat, a packed academic schedule, and occasional boredom in her studies lead to tiredness and sleep deprivation. Leela describes all these factors as distractions from her studies. To confront these obstacles, Leela grounds herself in meditation practice and speaks of the capacity of one's intention.

Leela is attuned to when her mind is unfocused or on task and applies a range of terms to describe the various states. When she is not completely focused, her mind state may vary from 'distracted' to 'wobbly' to 'fractured.' However, when using 'sati,' and being fully conscious of her state of mind, Leela is aware when she has obtained calm with a clear and open mind. Leela shares that when she employs mindful intention, good things follow and does not limit mindfulness to learning but rather extends the phenomenon to mindful living encapsulating speech, thought and living with purpose.

Chapter 9: Min - BKK reference student (equivalent grade 10/11)

9.1 Overview of the chapter

This chapter explores the learning journey of an exemplar reference student, nicknamed 'Min.' The pre-interview introduces her student profile and provides a glimpse into her thoughts on learning and mindfulness. Her reflection journal provides unique insights into her year's journey since she expresses herself both through words and illustrations. It concludes with a summary of Min's growth as a student and revelations about her perspectives on well-being.

9.2 Pre-interview

Min struck me as an exemplar participant due to her earnest interest in participating in the study. From our first meeting, she presented an interest in learning more about herself as a learner within the scope of the research aims. The school chose her for the reference group because she claimed to not partake in regular meditation practice. For the purposes of the study, I found her an interesting candidate due to her avid interest in being able to portray the experience of learning from the student voice.

9.2.1 Reflections on learning

During the pre-interview Min took her time to reflect on questions, ask for clarification and share insights. Asked to describe herself as a student, she shares:

'You mean like how I learn? I think I work hard sometimes but not always, if I understand I understand completely, if I don't, I don't…I often have to ask for help. If I have inspiration I can really do well, but if my concentration is not good sometimes I don't do as well.'

Min appreciates the importance of community and states that she seeks the help of friends to support her learning. It appears that her immediate surroundings play an important role in her learning:

'I need inspiration, like support from my parents, encouragement from friends, parents, teachers that I can do it.'

Words that she associates with learning are straightforward, as she describes it as, "…sitting in a classroom with a teacher providing instruction." But when asked to provide a more detailed description, she shares:

'There shouldn't be a definition for learning because learning is constant.'

Min's perception of learning is noteworthy as she makes a point of explaining how learning takes multiple forms and can permeate one's experience both in and out of the classroom. In describing the learning environment, she shares:

'I think the environment is important because if I'm in a group of friends that aren't good, then I might do poorly too (like a bad influence).'

When reflecting upon how she learns, Min adds:

'I think when I can apply something it helps me to learn, better than (studying) theory but theory is also important.'

'I try to focus, like why am I learning, why is it important, it's for college…so I will focus better.'

Her ability to connect the relevance of her current learning to her future goals is therefore, an impetus to keep Min focused on the importance of her present experience. Like other students, Min knows she has learned something upon being able to apply the concept. When she has difficulty, she says:

'Sometimes I will read further or ask a friend to teach me, or keep at it myself.'

This last sentiment is comparable to Rika's thoughts on applying one's inner will to persevere when tackling challenges. Generally, my initial impression of Min is that of the typical adolescent; she is hard-working and conscientious but at the same time, quite open about the occasional trials of life as a student.

9.2.2 Impressions of mindfulness

Min was selected by the school to be in the reference group because she did not engage in any regular mindfulness practice. Even so, it is noteworthy that Min demonstrates interest in the phenomenon of mindfulness and is well-informed about the practice, its origins and meaning. Since the school has been moving toward more formalized practice with the lower grades, it seems that the idea of meditation and mindfulness practice have begun to take shape within the school community. Faculty will occasionally employ mindfulness techniques in their classrooms and as Min corroborates:

'Sometimes, in the mornings on Mondays we have sitting meditation, or in the conference room sometimes they have us meditate while we're waiting for friends.'

Her thoughts on mindfulness flow naturally, although slightly off the mark at times. It is interesting how she uses several Thai words that are faintly disparate in meaning that help to depict the complexity of what mindfulness encompasses. She defines mindfulness as:

'It's the ability to be mindful and be with yourself.'

'The practice of mindfulness is about sitting quietly, thinking about what needs to be done, then after sitting for a while you prioritize what needs to get done.'

'When you practice mindfulness, you review what you did throughout the day whether things went well or not, but it's ok because that's part of the experience every day.'

Being mindful is correlated with being with oneself which is aligned with the literature, but Min's suggestion of reviewing the day is more in line with the idea of mind wandering that takes place during meditation. In her word association, Min confidently states that mindfulness is:

'Sitting meditation. Sometimes I sit as well on days when I'm distracted, it helps me to be still and not think about anything.'

The contradiction in Min's reflections of mindfulness serving as a review of one's day versus non-thinking indicates that while she possesses a degree of knowledge about the phenomenon, as a non-regular practitioner, there are loopholes in her depth of experience

and understanding. Yet, when asked her opinion on whether mindfulness effects learning, Min states with certainty:

'When you are mindful you are more focused on learning, because when you are distracted you've gone somewhere else and are not present to learn.'

Therefore, Min recognizes the benefits of meditation and mindfulness practice. She is able to provide an accurate definition of mindfulness but her personal experience has been sporadic. As a result, Min's experience of mindfulness is incongruent with her understanding of the phenomenon.

9.2.3 Reflections on school experience

Similar to other students, Min is resourceful in her approaches to learning. She appreciates the support of friends in the learning process and reflects:

'I think that when I share concepts with friends it's easier to understand...when the teacher gives us time to discuss the concepts it helps to seal the learning.'

Furthermore, it is through the process of revision with friends where Min checks for understanding:

'When I can explain it that means I've understood it.'

In regards to learning strategies, Min shares that she has employed some alternative techniques:

'Sometimes in class I will record the lecture.'

When asked about the strategies that the school employs to support her learning Min states that it depends on the teacher but that she generally appreciates a more interdisciplinary approach. To further enhance her learning experience, Min reflects:

'Practice. If I practice often I should do better, like in physics when I practice the problems then I find I can do it better.'

To a large extent, Min views herself at the center of her learning process. She holds herself accountable to revise and practice in order to concretize concepts introduced in a lesson. Friends and teachers are supportive entities in her learning experience but she takes responsibility for her own understanding and retention of knowledge.

9.3 Min's reflection journal

Since this school had a general interest in mindfulness practice as an institution, it struck me that even students in the reference group, like Min, began to adopt individual practice of their own accord. Min stands out within the reference group due to her honest account of her daily adolescent experience, backed by extensive illustrations in her reflective journal. Her written reflections are a mix of English and Thai; it is clear she has taken the opportunity to practice her English skills through journaling. What makes Min's journal distinctive is her unique penmanship and artistic expression, skillfully drawn to illustrate her year's journey.

From her very first entry on the 1st of January, Min writes of the desire to become a new person in the spirit of the new year:

'I will curse less and be more mindful. I will begin exercising again. I feel so tired because I haven't exercised in a while…'

By mid-January, Min admits to waning motivation due to exhaustion and tiredness; she has not committed to her New Year's goals and feels defeated:

'I need tutoring again, so boring. It's getting so hard to the point where I just don't understand. In the afternoon I kept falling asleep. This morning I kept making mistakes and I could only blame myself. I felt terrible. They were small things but still stressful.'

'I want to skip school but I won't. It would be a waste of money.'

'Today's word of the day is: "boring."'

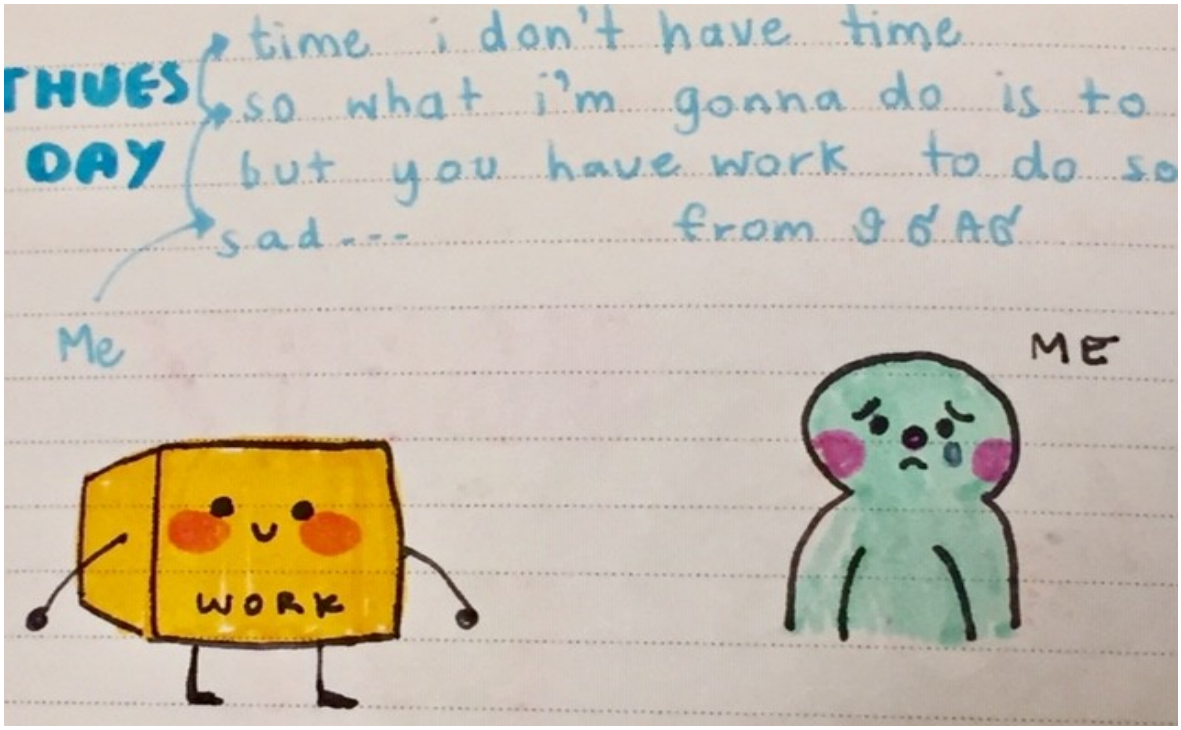
Ironically, Min uses the word 'boring' frequently, a word or experience she indicates in her interview as a hindrance to good learning. In Thai, 'boring' may not only connote feelings of boredom, but may also suggest a certain weariness when life is not running smoothly. Min's note about needing tutoring demonstrates a feeling of weariness in that she is unable to learn properly, reflected in the frustration she experiences in herself.

By the end of the month, Min admits to a difficult, tiring start to the year and writes how she chose to indulge herself by "not always completing homework, going out, shopping, not exercising, and eating sweets." It is in February, and the months that follow, when she independently decides to try meditation practice in order to achieve mindfulness.

In her subsequent journal entries, Min includes colorful drawings and annotates her daily life that include her brief meditation sessions, reading for pleasure, school work, family and social activities. One drawing depicts a smiling block of 'work' communicating with a blue person who is crying (representing herself):

> *'Me: Time I don't have time*
> *Me: So what I'm gonna do is to go to sleep!*
> *Work: But you have work to do so you don't get sleep*
> *Me: Sad…'*

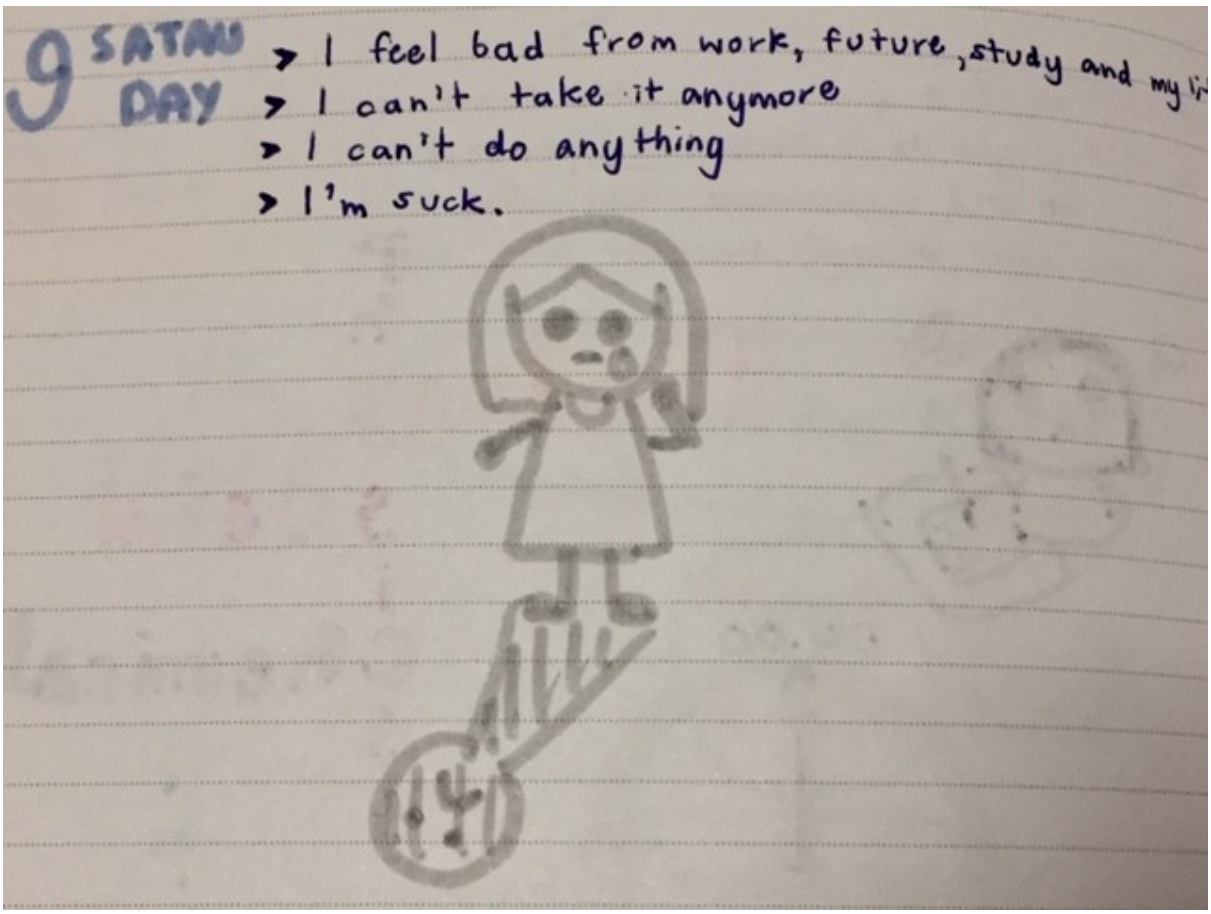
Figure 6. **Min's illustration of struggles with workload**



Min's illustration is simple, but clearly communicates a typical battle that most high school adolescents face. The smiling block of work is a strong voice compelling her to study. But her tearful self-depiction, although feeling tired and pressed for time, has no alternative than to face the work before her.

These challenging days continue for Min, as depicted in the following illustration that reflects the impact of her life stressors on her self-image:

Figure 7. **Min's illustration of self-image**



Once again, Min illustrates quite plainly, her personal strife as a student struggling to balance her many obligations and worries. The fact that it ends with an insult to herself is an unfortunate sign that the weight of her concerns directly impacts her self-image and confidence.

Finally, this next image accentuates the commotion of her thoughts, accompanied by bulleted reflections:

'I didn't feel good in the morning.'

'I didn't understand Chemical [sic] content, it [sic] hard.'

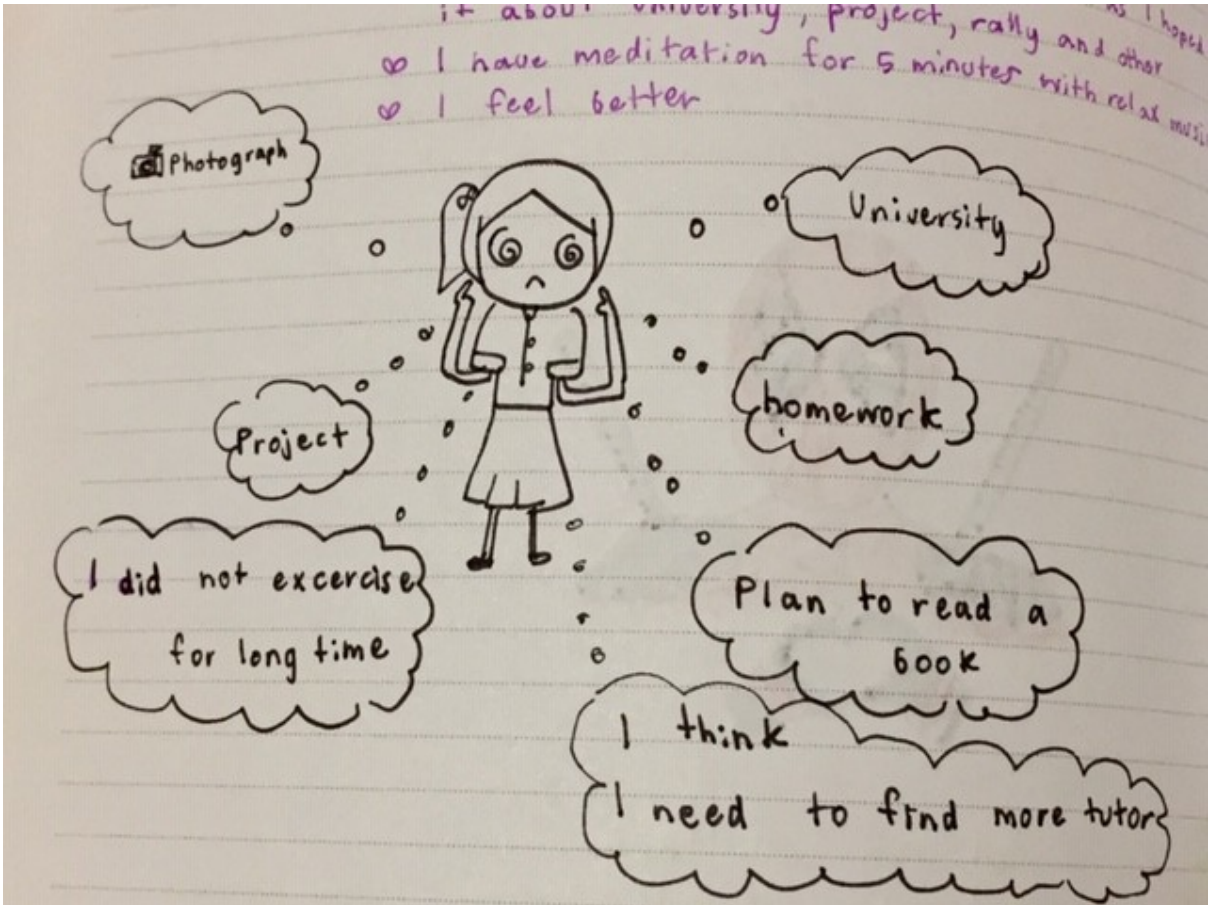
'After school, it's raining heavily.'

'I worry that I will not be able to do as I hoped it [sic] about University, project, rally and other [sic]'

'I have meditation for 5 minutes with relax [sic] music'

'I feel better'

Figure 8. **Min's illustration of her overactive mind**



Min's thoughts and feelings are a whirl, as are her eyes in her illustration. Her thought patterns are scattered, as thoughts tend to be - but by transferring her experience into quotes and thought bubbles, this drawing provides a visual aid that is perceivable. Regardless of language or culture, Min's depiction offers a universal representation of the stressed adolescent.

An activity that begins to surface as a challenging but enjoyable pastime for Min is photography. As the year progresses, she notes that she is often assigned as photographer for school events and religious ceremonies. Furthermore, she begins to exercise again and take an interest in reading self-help books. While life doesn't seem to be getting any less hectic, Min somehow manages to cope as her later entries suggest:

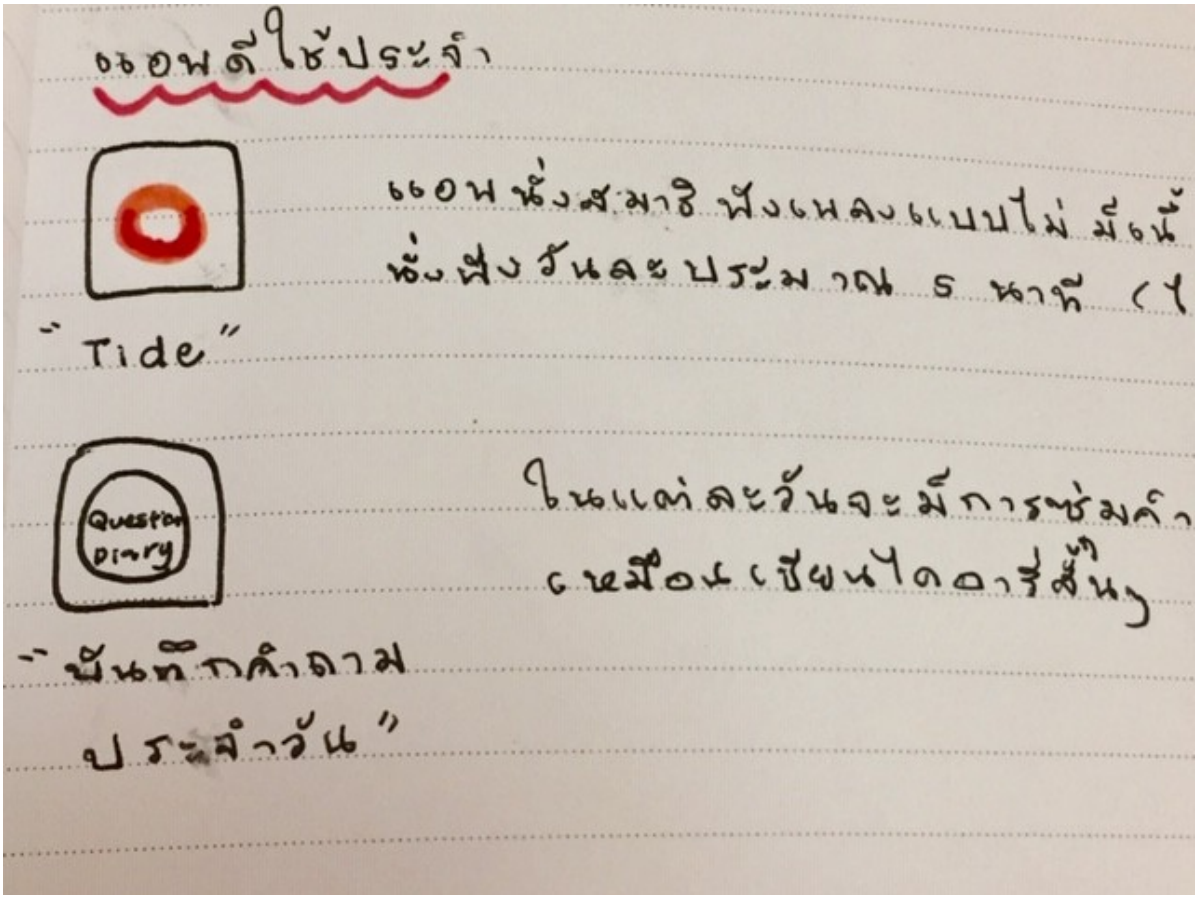
'It's the week of end of term examinations. I'm so tired from all the revision but I've passed - yay!'

'I ran at Suanlum for 2.5 km (what I can manage). I felt more active and able to breathe better.'

'I got several books, mostly from the psychology field. For example, the book "Because you learn, you grow" …it is a book that provides insight and inspiration on how to live your life.'

Although Min continues to note intermittent meditation sessions, the general impression from her entries is that she develops an interest in overall well-being. Based on her interests in capturing human experience through art, photography, and psychology books, it can be ascertained that Min views mindfulness as a complement to holistic living. During our post-interview, she describes the use of a phone application for her sitting meditation and that she "listens to calm music so as not to think about anything, allowing the mind to be clear." Min's understanding of mindfulness as "being with yourself" and "not thinking too much but thinking good thoughts," indicates an appreciation for the importance of a present state of mind but also suggests that the practice can be a means towards self-improvement.

Figure 9. **Min's illustration of her most used applications - 'Tide' for sitting meditation and 'Question Diary' to record daily self-reflections**



Min's final illustration towards the back of her journal offers phone applications that she uses regularly as a means of self-care. The 'Tide' application is something she uses for meditation sessions accompanied by music without lyrics. The 'Question Diary' application encourages users to answer daily questions as a means of recording brief reflections.

9.4 Post-interview

In our post-interview, Min was more at ease and forthright in her responses. She carried herself in much the same way as I recalled from the previous year, but somehow, she was more relaxed in my company. She continues to own her learning experience and appears to have taken on more leadership opportunities in the last year. Her responses reflect growth as a student while simultaneously demonstrating characteristic trials of an adolescent struggling to balance many areas of responsibility.

9.4.1 Reflections on learning

Ironically, Min's description of herself as a student is not drastically different from her response in the previous year. She clarifies the question again and responds with essentially, the same sentiment:

'Kind of student? Like learner? Well, sometimes I'm attentive, sometimes not, but if I have inspiration then I will really work hard, or I will think of my future and family, and work hard for them. But I can be lazy too. Sometimes I'm lazy too, I need inspiration and encouragement to propel me forward, if there is none then I will continue to lose fire.'

Min appears honest and realistic in her reflection of self. She enjoys her friendships and finds her teachers to be very supportive. She appreciates the positive school community and shares that the environment plays an important role in her learning:

'If I didn't have good friends helping me then I'd be super lazy, only play video games, don't want to learn, skip class. I also have good teachers who ask how I'm doing, follow up, friends are supportive of one another.'

As in the pre-interview, Min comes across as a resourceful student who takes advantage of technology and available supports to reinforce her learning. In the classroom, Min states that learning begins with paying attention:

'Well, I listen to what the teacher is saying, sometimes take notes, but mostly if I'm paying attention I will remember, if I'm not paying attention then I won't remember so sometimes I will record, if I can't follow quickly enough I will record; I use videos and other sources, I use phone apps sometimes like 'clear' where you can view others' notes too, or follow free YouTube videos to help me understand something. If I really don't understand I will ask friends.'

Min's view of learning is quite similar to her previous word association:

'At school it's about receiving knowledge, sometimes it may be boring but we're still receiving knowledge that you can apply to certain parts of your life.'

Beyond her perfunctory description of learning, Min expands on her growth as a learner outside of the classroom:

'This year I've learned a lot of new things. I've become a 'leader,' never thought I'd be one for sports day. On sports day I led the parade, first time and it was very exciting, usually I am just an athlete, this time I had to dress up and represent, and took pictures of people and the event, and posted them online. It's small things but they were new concepts for me.'

As depicted in her reflection journal, Min indeed took on more responsibilities in the past year as the school photographer and other sundry extracurricular activities. In regards to classroom learning however, Min circles back to her theme of inspiration:

'As I said, I need inspiration; in order to reach my goals, the people surrounding me are important. If they believe in me then I will also believe in myself; even if it doesn't come out well at least I know I've done my best.'

The notion of inspiration emerges several times and was mentioned in the pre-interview as well. The turbulence of adolescence is articulated clearly in her reflection journal, so her reference to the need for encouragement and motivation is unsurprising.

9.4.2 Impressions of mindfulness

Min's understanding of mindfulness has improved in a year's time despite not having engaged in regular meditation practice. Upon reflecting on its meaning, she says:

'Samati, being with yourself, thinking before doing.'

Her use of the word 'samati' conjures a host of terms like 'mindful,' 'focus,' 'concentration,' 'still mind,' that together, encompass the essence of mindfulness. Although she did not take part in any formalized practice, nor did she attest to any regular self-practice, Min does engage in sitting meditation occasionally in order to "clear the mind." She elaborates on the idea of being with oneself and extends this notion beyond sitting meditation:

'When practicing mindfulness, when doing many activities if you are with yourself you can do several things… it's not just sitting meditation it's like morning exercise like when I run at Suanlum Park by

myself I can be mindful and have a destination. It is like being with myself, when doing activities on my own I can do them well and finish projects, it's a way to be with yourself, doing things mindfully.'

She further adds:

'mindfulness...sati is about not allowing oneself to panic.'

'The practice of mindfulness is about being with yourself, in order to be mindful you need to be attentive, be with yourself, not thinking too much but thinking good thoughts.'

Therefore, despite not being a regular practitioner, Min has a healthy understanding of what mindfulness entails and seems to appreciate its benefits. She notes that when she does meditate or makes a conscious effort to be mindful, she experiences a certain energy:

'…when you tap into that energy in the morning you can build from that energy throughout the day into the evening.'

Min's perspective on the relation between mindfulness and learning reflects a better understanding of how being mindful can improve one's ability to focus:

'When practicing mindfulness, I think there can be some impact because after practicing after some time I have to remind myself like, "Hey I'm in class studying, LEARN!" Like I have to study but I'm holding my phone and... it's better to focus on learning, it's for my future, so there is impact. Also, I feel like I have better sati when I'm still. It's like I am talking to myself, don't know if that sounds funny but it's like I'm talking to myself asking, "How was my day?" etc.'

Min's allusion to self-talk coincides with her definition of 'being with oneself.' This internal dialogue is in line with Min's reflections on thinking before acting and navigating one's thoughts from the negative to the more positive. While these facets of self-talk stray from the core definition of mindfulness, it reflects Min's personal experience of the phenomenon.

9.4.3 Reflections on school experience

Like many students, Min asserts a preference for classroom learning that is engaging and interactive. As mentioned previously, Min is often resourceful with her learning techniques and will employ the use of help videos and various technology to enhance her educational experience. When it comes to teaching style, Min shares:

'The style that works for me is one that is not too boring, like only has slides or long overview of information, long and dry. I want to learn to understand, do activities with friends, learn about topics that are interesting; if there are slides filled with text it can be too much for the eyes. Slides that have only images and followed by explanation or activities would be better for recall.'

'Sometimes I check Youtube clips for further explanation or check Facebook for test tips, extra enrichment from books at the store, phone apps, there are so many apps for free tutoring help.'

Min has a practical view of learning. Her response to knowing how she has learned is similar to other students:

'Well if for example if I can explain to others and they can follow...if they can't follow then maybe I don't fully understand. If I can explain it well that means I understand it.'

But beyond acknowledging that she has learned something by being able to explain it to others, Min believes learning is life-long:

'Good learning has no end; we can learn throughout our lives, if we've never tried something before we can try, many options not just one, no limits, so many directions. If I try something new it feels like we are advancing, like increasing our personal experiences; it's like 'I know how to do this now' it's knowing you've learned, just being able to try it is a means of learning.'

It seems that Min views learning as an on-going continuum of experience. She views learning new things as advancing the self not only as a student, but as an individual. Furthermore, she attests to the importance of attention in learning:

'Attention in learning is very important because if you are not attentive, since learning is continuous, you will not be able to follow. Sometimes I am not attentive and need to review or go back, I can usually catch up and make the connections. If you take long breaks, it can be hard to pick up, you forget.'

Additionally, Min shares that in order to maintain this attention, mindfulness plays a significant role:

'If you are not mindful, are distracted, oh wanting to play with your phone or do other things you will lose mindfulness, like when I'm in class, like I'm paying attention but if I look at my phone just for a moment, I'm gone, my mindfulness/awareness is lost right away. I usually need to shut off the phone and leave it in my bag. It ruins my meditation; anything that ruins my meditation I will remove.'

While Min was selected for the reference group since she does not practice meditation regularly, she still appears to understand the phenomenon and acknowledges its benefits. The fact that she suggests that the phone can distract her and affect her mindfulness (or meditation), thereby pulling her away from attentive learning, indicates that she recognizes a correlation between mindfulness and learning.

When asked to reflect on any strategies the school uses to enrich learning, Min says:

'I think the school should have researching and learning to enhance interest outside of the classroom so we can see the real thing, not just from the textbook; like being able to visit a facility to see how things are done.'

Lastly, when considering how her learning experience could be improved, Min adds:

'I like to learn. Not just learning but I like to do activities alongside learning like extracurriculars. Learning alone can be boring. After school (when) I finish my homework I like to do art, exercise, go outside for a walk and then come back to study. It is important to have extracurriculars too so that learning won't be too boring.'

Again, Min emphasizes the need for learning not to be 'boring.' Her interests in art, photography and sports reflect a student with an active lifestyle. Her responses are thoughtful and straightforward; Min enjoys learning but appreciates an active learning experience. When fully engaged and given the opportunity for hands-on experience, Min thrives as a student.

9.5 Summary

Min presents an important voice in this study due to her distinctive stance on mindfulness and learning. As a learner, she attests to the occasional vacillations of mind, pulling her attention in various directions. She mentions the need for inspiration and encouragement in order to employ sustained attention towards learning and long-term goals. From our first meeting to the post-interview, there was a notable difference in how she presented herself. In a year's time, Min appeared to be more comfortable with me, confidently maintaining her perspective on the importance of a supportive learning environment to enhance her learning experience.

As a reference student, Min was originally identified as a non-practitioner of mindfulness meditation. Nevertheless, due to variables such as the school's interest in meditation and the presumable sway of culture and religion, it appears that Min was influenced by her surroundings over the course of the year. During the pre-interview, her definitions of mindfulness were partially aligned with established views. By the end of the year, her interpretations were more precise, and her interview responses, coupled with her journal reflections indicate a seamless alignment with her notion of 'being with yourself.' Her journal entries and illustrations depict an honest account of Min's year, a journey speckled with moments of stress, despair, encouragement, and growth.

Min's growing interest in the field of psychology and well-being becomes more explicit in her journal around early spring. She is intrigued by self-help books and explores topics on perspective and insightful living. Her interest in art and photography also add some vitality to her year; despite the constant challenge of her overwhelming workload, Min's engagement in her artistic endeavors provide a sort of reprieve from the intensity of coursework and assessments. Min's stance on self-talk in the midst of being mindful allows one to engage one's attention. While Min initially spoke of the need for external motivators such as inspiration and encouragement from others, along with a supportive community, by year's end, she has developed into a student who is capable of tapping into her own internal source of inspiration and encouragement in order to attend to life's demands.

Chapter 10: Reflections and Discussion

10.1 Overview of the chapter

This chapter reflects on some of the findings and knowledge gained from exploring mindfulness and learning from two cultural contexts. It revisits the original queries of this research study around the influence of cultural constructs of the mind on student experience of mindfulness and learning. It ponders the intentions of mindfulness practice in schools as an example of a commodified well-being measure. The notion that one's cultural understanding of the mind can influence the experience of mindfulness and learning is demonstrated in Figure 10. To further explicate this finding, the role of language is discussed followed by substantiation of differing perceptions from both cultural contexts.

10.2 Mindfulness: universal remedy or way of life?

As introduced in the literature, mindfulness programs are cropping up in schools and businesses across the globe (Weare 2017). Evolving from therapeutic antidote to trendy lifestyle to technological gadgetry, mainstream mindfulness has become a multi-billion dollar industry that has taken on a chameleonic guise in order to be commodified and accepted by Western society (Hyland 2015). Established as a means towards inner peace by pundits and business people alike, mindfulness is all at once both vintage and new age. Thus, the opportunity to glean an insider's view of how modern-day students from two different sides of the planet perceive and experience the age-old phenomenon of mindfulness has been an enlightening journey.

From the very beginning of this research study, there were significant observations of the participants during the selection process from both schools. In Amsterdam, it was relatively easy to find students who had no experience in mindfulness practice. The challenges in Amsterdam were more around the logistics of organizing the mindfulness sessions for the test student group. In Bangkok, every single student had mindfulness experience irrespective of frequency of practice; each was able to describe the phenomenon and provide varying depths of understanding of its interpretation and purpose. The Thai students, regardless of interest or experience in mindfulness, could speak to its virtue with relative ease.

As such, it seems that the Amsterdam test group viewed mindfulness much like their participation in this research study — a temporary commitment. Their introduction to mindfulness may have been educational, but it was not transformative or particularly impactful. The techniques acquired were tools that could be applied on an 'as needed' basis. On the other hand, both test and reference Thai student groups understood mindfulness to be a facet of their lives, so it was inescapable. Mindfulness is omnipresent and a choice to be made; the Thai students communicated consistently that the choice to be mindful was always an available option. Not merely critical for learning, they believed the ability to be mindful would enhance their lives and relationships through mindful thought, speech, and action.

Figure 10. Exemplar participant demographics and impressions on impact of mindfulness on learning

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Impressions on Impact of Mindfulness on Learning
Joey (AMS test)	M	17	Australian	Mindfulness practice has no real impact on knowledge retention, but enhances attention to learning.
Rika (AMS reference)	F	16	Turkish	No previous mindfulness training, but breathing in and out before a presentation can lead to a calmer state. One's inner will is the critical requisite to learning.
Leela (BKK test)	F	17	Thai	Benefits from mindfulness practice. Meditation before studying helps to avoid distractions and supports long term study. Meditation leads to focused study which helps with knowledge retention.
Min (BKK reference)	F	17	Thai	Mindfulness practice is about being with yourself. In order to be mindful, you need to be attentive which is important for classroom learning as well as your future.

10.3 The semantics of mindfulness

The word *mindfulness* itself has led to compelling revelations about how it is perceived and experienced by the student groups. In English, mindfulness is mindfulness. The idea of present awareness has become a widely accepted definition by Western practitioners. In Thai, there are a number of words that connote 'mind,' words that are associated with

one's will and inner spirit. The depth of meaning in the first segment of the compounded term leads to even greater complexity to the definition of mindfulness.

10.3.1 Perceptions of mindfulness in Amsterdam

Despite mainstream definitions of mindfulness, it is still considered a rather wooly term as both test and reference students in Amsterdam conjured up descriptors like 'self-reflecting,' 'calming,' 'peaceful,' and 'knowing yourself best both physically and psychologically.' As one test student aptly stated:

'Can't say I know the definition of it but it's one of those words that I know what it means but I can't say what it means.'

By the end of the year, the Amsterdam test group's definitions of mindfulness were distinctly more refined in comparison to the reference group. While the reference group offered broad definitions, such as:

'It's a way to clear your head and focus on important tasks that you have to do, while also helping you to deal with the stress.'

'Like calm, uh, self-discovery, focus.'

The test group was able to provide definitions that demonstrated learnings from their mindfulness training sessions:

'Now I would define mindfulness as, just kind of being aware, being able to identify…communicating and being honest with yourself through meditation, like taking 10 deep breaths instead of overthinking, just being able to identify your thoughts instead of overthinking.'

'Mindfulness being the…ok, kind of like the realization that your mind, your brain is almost like a muscle, and it can be trained and at the same time it needs to be mastered as like a skill, because your brain can wander and mindfulness is the way for you to I guess, control your own thinking.'

As noted from Joey's experience, he described being able to view 'the bigger picture' and explained this new awareness as:

'Being aware and able to control your mind but peacefully and in a relaxed way…'

Additionally, Rika's overview of her year was deftly summarized in her thoughts on one's inner will, illustrating a certain drive and ambition to stay on course towards one's goals. Rika's point about the inner will is rather intriguing, given what we understand of the Thai language in that the mind can also be connoted as one's will. As a natural corollary to her reflections on her learning experience, Rika stumbles upon the idea that mindfulness is not exclusively linked to the mind.

In summary, by the end of one year, the students in Amsterdam ascertained that mindfulness is indeed, a state of being that can be acquired through practice and effort. However, it also became quite evident that the application of mindfulness techniques needed only be employed prior to stressful periods as a means to relieve tension or prior to an exam. While this understanding still points to benefits of mindfulness practice, it is continual evidence of how the phenomenon is employed on an ad hoc basis.

10.3.2 Perceptions of mindfulness in Bangkok

In juxtaposition, the Thai test and reference groups offered interpretations of mindfulness that were either verbose and accompanied by a myriad of descriptive terms or succinctly explicit. From the start, all Thai student participants mentioned meditation or sitting meditation in some aspect of their interpretation of mindfulness. One test student specified:

'It means you must be able to meditate in order to be mindful. Like when it's exam period, I'm nervous so I know I need to sit still and think, "I'm about to test" …and reflect about what I've revised and read because if I'm not mindful then whatever I've read will not be accessible or remembered.'

Another test student shared:

'The mind is very still, without distractions, being with oneself.'

And a third test student said:

'Whatever I'm doing, I need to know what I am doing, focus on the moment, with no distraction, no carelessness.'

The reference students similarly, offered discerning impressions of the phenomenon:

'The act of concentrating in order to achieve the best results in whatever you do.'

'If you are mindful you need to be in the present situation and be aware of your surroundings; if something happens that effects your emotions (like in an emergency) you need to have mindfulness in order to control your emotions and respond carefully.'

Thus, based on initial pre-interview responses, it was evident that students had a strong foundational understanding of mindfulness. The quality of their responses may have been influenced by the extent of individual interest and practice, but nonetheless, the students conveyed their general knowledge and were able to apply various nuanced words to describe the phenomenon.

The post-interview responses continued to reflect sound understanding of mindfulness by both test and reference groups. Some of the test students expressed the following impressions of mindfulness:

'Not being careless…'

'When one needs to monitor one's own emotions…there are times when others' words may affect us or upset us but we have to be mindful in how we respond or address the situation.'

The notion of "knowing oneself" or "being with yourself" was a common response, as seen from our exemplar students, Leela and Min. One reference student provided a specific example of how mindfulness can play out in her daily life:

'Mindfulness in the act of speaking: speaking to others throughout life. I feel like words can be knives that can pierce people's hearts. As for myself I can be very sensitive with friends' words, sometimes friends may not think too deeply about their words but I think about what is said and how we communicate…so many words…sometimes I think it is better to not say anything because it may be hurtful, but I know not everyone has to be like me because we are all different, but I think it is a way to take care of our connections, a way to nurture these relationships.'

This last reflection is reminiscent of Bodhi's (2011) connection between mindfulness practice and the Buddha's teaching of Dhamma whereby, "At its heart lies a system of

training that leads to insight and the overcoming of suffering." It must therefore be recognized that the influence of culture and religion give rise to both variance in interpretation of mindfulness as well as experience of the phenomenon. The Thai students' multi-dimensional understanding of mindfulness clearly demonstrated impact on their lives in a more holistic sense.

As previously mentioned in the literature on 'hermeneutic phenomenology,' which designates research as "oriented toward lived experience and interpreting the 'texts' of life" (van Manen 1997, Creswell 2013), the Thai descriptors of mindfulness, partially pulled from ancient Sanskrit for certain religious terms, unquestionably impacts student perception and experience. The Thai students suggested a relationship between mindfulness and learning of their own accord. To them, mindfulness applies to aspects of student learning as well as a manner of being and relating to others, most importantly to themselves.

10.4 The collective versus the individual — differing views on learning

Another interesting observation from this research study was in regard to how students viewed themselves as learners within the contexts of their specific learning environments. Eastern cultures are traditionally viewed as collective communities in comparison to the more individualistic values of Western societies. Surprisingly, this study illustrated some antithetical findings. Based on the student interviews and reflections, the Thai students tended to demonstrate a more internal locus of control, echoing the work of Bandura (1997; 1977) and Wang (1983) while the Amsterdam students indicated more external factors that contributed to their learning experience.

In general, students from both schools agreed on the importance of a good teacher. Based on the student interviews, it is reasonable to infer that good teaching that engages students and provides practical instruction enhances the learning experience. In addition to engaging, qualified teachers, the Amsterdam students indicated a plethora of resources available to them - Google classroom, Veracross, course websites, and unlimited support from teachers. One reference student shared:

'Well, the teachers are always there if you need more help. They understand if you're having problems with the subject or if you've been sick, they help you to understand…before the due date they generally

understand how hard school can be as well as balancing other factors, (they are) very empathetic which is good.'

This notion of a collective, supportive learning environment coincides with the literature of flourishing schools in which the development of sustainable learning communities aid in the promotion of thriving learning environments (Cherkowski and Walker 2013). As noted in Rika's reflections, she strongly believed in the importance of teacher awareness in the unique learning styles of their students. This understanding, coupled with knowledge of the mental health needs of stressed adolescence would improve the learning experience. These types of reflections are not uncommon in a Western educational setting, and supports the rationale to offer more mindfulness programs in schools to address this growing need (Mapel 2012, Zenner et al. 2014).

Therefore, it is interesting to observe that the Thai students frequently reflected on the student's responsibility to own their learning. For instance, one test student stated:

'I think every school helps the students, I think the importance lies with the student, it's about how much you put into what the teachers have taught you.'

'I believe the school has a partial role in student learning, whether it is the teaching content or different teaching techniques but mainly I believe it has to do with the individual learner.'

'Today was a marathon of testing from math, English and chemistry. I studied and did my best but still got some answers wrong…all due to my own carelessness.'

One reference student shared:

'If I expand my knowledge; motivate myself to do further research or do prior reading, this can help to further my understanding.'

Also, as previously noted, Min emphasized the need for continual practice in order for her to improve in a subject. While she also spoke of the need for inspiration and encouragement in learning, these were external factors that would merely enrich her student experience. Such independent variables could conceivably be favorable conditions for any learner. Over the course of a year, it could be understood from Min's reflections

that her learning journey was ultimately contingent on the responsibility that she bore as the student.

Consequently, this research study brings to light some interesting dichotomies about the learning experiences from the purview of students in two different countries. By exploring student understanding of mindfulness and whether regular practice impacts the learning experience, the research has revealed a compelling finding: the student relationship towards learning.

As a representative of Western education, the school in Amsterdam typified the learning community framework that comprises shared responsibility by multiple stakeholders. It is therefore the collective responsibility of the learning community to support individual learning towards prospective benchmarks. In contrast, the school in Bangkok, representing more Eastern instructional frameworks, recognized the school as a significant vehicle for learning, but the onus to achieve weighed heavily on the individual student. The student relationship towards learning, individual school philosophy on academics, and varying views on mindfulness and its place in education all point to the significance of context and culture. It is for these reasons that mindfulness programs in schools may have differing impact depending on the institutions in which they are employed.

Chapter 11: Conclusion

11.1 Overview of the chapter

This concluding chapter revisits the original intentions of exploring research in the area of mindfulness in schools. The complexity of the phenomenon and moreover, its introduction into the educational context has marked implications on policy and practice for schools and individuals. The key findings of this phenomenological research are noted with particular emphasis on how the influence of cross-cultural borrowing of policies can transpire within schools. Given the findings on the influence of cultural constructs on the student experience, suggestions for future research are offered to further explore developments around the relationship between mindfulness and learning.

11.2 Key findings of this thesis

The very cornerstone of Buddhist philosophy is centered on the practice and experience of the individual. Whether considered a religion, an ideology, or general system of beliefs, its fundamental tenets stem from a basis of self-discovery. It is the individual practitioner alone who will be able to encounter, through practice and patience, the essence of mindfulness. The results of this research illustrate seminal findings in regard to whether the experience of mindfulness can be extracted from its Buddhist roots, rendering our understanding of "the mind" into comprehensible terms according to Western standards and still be interpreted as an authentic practice.

As demonstrated by the exemplar student cases in this thesis, cultural context and language have enormous influence not only on the experience of mindfulness, but also the experience of learning. This mindfulness wave has permeated our modern lives promoting promises of tangible peace and improved wellness at the touch of our fingertips on our smartphones. The placement of Buddha statues in gardens and backyards supposedly connotes serenity, when in reality, such practice is highly disrespectful as the Buddha is a relic that is honored and revered. It is a most opportune time to address how mindfulness has taken on new meaning to suit our modern lives and in so doing, made its way into our schools.

In order for many Western institutions to embrace the idea of mindfulness, a secular focus on the practice was adopted. By detaching the practice from its religious roots, it has become marketed as an exercise for the brain, a healthy habit that anyone can adopt. This thesis has demonstrated how one's understanding of mindfulness, along with the extent of one's relationship to its practice, can have an effect on the experience of learning. The cultural constructs and hermeneutic connotations around mindfulness are vast, giving rise to a diametric correlation with individual experience.

11.2.1 The understanding of the mind influences the experience of mindfulness

This thesis has demonstrated that the cultural constructs of the mind have a profound influence on individual interpretation and understanding of both learning, mindfulness, and the relationship between the two. As seen in section 5.1 and the exemplar cases, the Amsterdam students had a mixed understanding of the concept of mindfulness. In contrast, the Bangkok students possessed multi-layered connotations for the phenomenon, indicating that these cultural constructs of the mind do in fact, influence the experience of mindfulness and learning. The idea that cultural nuances impact interpretation of social reality (Coffey 2014) is reflected clearly in the Thai language and how students employed a range of terms to express themselves. The gradation of meaning to describe the 'mind' or the 'will' could also be characterized by a degree of strength or intensity, connoting the extent to which the student was distracted or focused. The observation that such terms were used consistently among both test and reference groups affirmed that such usage was a cultural norm.

The findings from the student groups in Amsterdam further exemplify a narrower understanding of the mind and in turn, experience of mindfulness. As outlined in section 10.3.1, the reflections shared by the international students revealed how new the phenomenon of mindfulness was to them. They provided insightful thoughts on learning and mindfulness, but in so doing it became evident that they were more adept at unpacking their experience of learning in comparison to mindfulness. In section 10.3.2, it was evident that both test and reference groups in Bangkok possessed stronger understanding of mindfulness. As Husserlian (1931) phenomenology focuses on the essence of experience, it is worth noting that the international students'

experience was nascent in comparison to the Thai students. Considering Husserl (1931) and Heidegger's (1959) theories on 'lived experience' and the inherent impact on understanding makes the cultural and religious backdrop in Thailand rather significant in how the students have come to interpret mindfulness.

The distinctive findings between the two student groups reflect an example of how cross- cultural borrowing of ideas and policies can get lost in translation (Steiner-Khamsi 2014). While school leaders may leverage the argument to incorporate more mindfulness programs in the name of increased student well-being, they ought to take heed in how its interpretation may conceivably lead to varying experiences in practice.

11.2.2 Role of mindfulness in learning

In section 2.3 of the literature review, various aspects of the experience of learning were explored. The role of attention, learner perception of attainment, and learner ownership were discussed as contributing factors to the learning process. Considering the evolving young mind that Vygotsky (1986: 166-170) describes as developing "higher mental processes of voluntary attention and logical memory," the imperative to attend in order to learn has become a sound rationale for schools to adopt mindfulness programs. This justification for mindfulness, particularly when introduced as a secular practice, has facilitated the transition into schools as an acceptable initiative in the name of improved well-being for enhanced performance.

From the start of this research inquiry, it was noted that both schools in each cultural context demonstrated interest in mindfulness programs; the extent of interest however, was uneven. The school in Amsterdam embraced the idea as a beneficial initiative for interested students, whereas the school in Bangkok already incorporated school-wide practice that engaged all staff and students. Their plans to establish the High Meditation Instructor Course was targeted for younger students, availing them to more in-depth practice. The observation of the school in Amsterdam's view on mindfulness reflects Weare's sentiment that "mindfulness has always had a presence in schools, but as something of a fringe activity" (MiSP 2017). This unbalanced view on the promotion of mindfulness programs in schools consequently, sets a nebulous tone on its value on learning.

11.2.3 Cultural implications of mindfulness practice

The most substantial finding from this research points to the significance of cultural constructs in individual understanding of mindfulness. The Westernized version of mindfulness that has been detached from its ethical context was reflected in the experiences of the Amsterdam students. Mindfulness served a functional purpose, a means to an end. As discussed in the literature regarding policy borrowing and cross-cultural considerations, scholars have accentuated the complexity involved in societal, pedagogical and individual contexts (Steiner Khamsi 2014, Crossley 2012, Daniels et. al. 2009). Based on the firsthand accounts of the students from Amsterdam, it is evident that their perceptions of mindfulness were narrow and less sophisticated due to limited experience and understanding about the phenomenon.

This observation is not a criticism of the student experience in Amsterdam, but the mixed interpretations and underdeveloped perceptions of mindfulness speak to an equally fledgling understanding of the phenomenon at large. In alignment with the literature on comparative education practices, the observations from the student groups in Bangkok clearly reflected the impact of context. The Thai test students were individuals who meditated regularly through self-practice and the reference students did not – however, all students possessed a refined understanding and regard for mindfulness. The cultural constructs that constituted their perceptions were imbued in their thought processes and belief systems as Thai youth.

As noted in several of the Thai student reflections, mindfulness represented more than present awareness; their understanding extended to ways of thinking, speaking, and behaving. The students from Amsterdam were of an eclectic, international background so from a cultural standpoint, their views on mindfulness were mixed, but primarily secular. This variance in cultural understanding, coupled with the absence of the ethical strand of mindfulness that speaks to compassion and loving kindness, leads to a truncated experience. The consistency by which the Thai students spoke of living mindfully demonstrates in contrast, a much fuller understanding of the phenomenon.

11.3 Implications for policy and practice

As this research inquiry has shown, applying mindfulness in schools can present numerous challenges and give rise to divergent experiences depending on the cultural context. Albeit small-scale, this study captured the influence of culture, the effects of policy borrowing, and subsequently, the resulting impact on learning. Schools are advised to revisit their aim in incorporating mindfulness initiatives to avail students of a more meaningful experience. Looking back on this research journey, this study has led to further reflections on my own practice, school-level practice and wider policy.

11.3.1 My own practice – the mindful counselor

Reflecting upon the early motivations that inspired this exploration, as introduced in 1.2.1, I have come to the humble realization that my unique upbringing has allowed for an equally unique disposition well-suited for a helping profession. In my work with young people, helping them to recognize and manage problems in a thoughtful manner is not merely about a focus on resolution. The nature of my counseling practice has also revolved around the ability to be acutely aware and exercise a mindful presence with each of my students. Over the years, I believe I have practiced the ability to be with students' pain without absorbing it directly. This research journey has led to valuable insights around the delicate equilibrium that exists within the counseling relationship – one where both client and counselor must avail themselves to full engagement and mindful presence in order to flourish.

11.3.2 School-level practice – is mindfulness fit for purpose?

As discussed in section 2.3, the experience of learning is multi-dimensional in its inception, delivery and attainment. The idea of student engagement is considered a pre-requisite to learning, but when the concept of attention is further examined, particularly in relation to mindfulness, the task of drawing one's focus is far from simple. The secularization of mindfulness, and moreover, the recognition that mindfulness practice supports sustained attention, has been a marketable selling point for schools claiming to nurture student wellness and academic performance. However, amidst intense competition within our global school network, it is worth pondering whether policy leaders have considered whether mindfulness is fit for purpose.

An objective that learning and mindfulness share is that of claiming attention. Considering that both phenomena entail individual focus– this research study has demonstrated how the two experiences seem to manifest in a parallel fashion, but are actually more asynchronous in character and subject to individual experience. Just as Lewin (2014) notes about the capacity for attention to exhibit both involuntary wandering as much as voluntary control, we see this very revelation unfold in Rika's reflections. In 7.2, Rika notes rather markedly how wavering her mind, and that of the average young person can be. As a reference student, Rika did not engage in any mindfulness program, formal or otherwise. Thus, her concluding thoughts on engaging the "inner will" in order to persevere with learning and other ancillary stressors shed new insight on whether mindfulness in schools is as essential as some may claim.

Furthermore, while the unanticipated change in mindfulness programming in the school in Bangkok (4.4) was an initial disappointment, the rich reflections and findings from the students who engaged in self-practice represented a silver lining in this research journey. The initial research findings in Chapter 5.2 (Figure 2) firmly notes all Thai students in both test and reference groups connoting mindfulness with awareness and meditation. In Figure 4, the students again, universally agree that mindfulness contributes to the learning process. Notwithstanding the programmatic shift, the Thai test students who engaged in self-practice meditation reflected on their learning and engagement of their own accord. These reflections on the relationship and impact between mindfulness and learning emerged from the students, without any specific guidance from the school. This data point is again, a conclusive finding that points to the influence of culture on student understanding.

11.3.3 Considerations for wider policy? The uncertain landscape of mindfulness in schools

Mindfulness in schools is now a widely accepted initiative globally, but its institution in various school systems has taken on an amorphous design. As stated by Purser (2019; 2016) and Hyland (2016; 2015), the reduction of mindfulness to secular practice, whether for immediate benefit, capitalist gain, or otherwise — may lead to unintended consequences. As substantiated by the student reflections from both test and reference

groups in Amsterdam, mindfulness is, more or less, viewed as a technique for stress relief and possible aid to learning. In contrast, the Thai students conveyed a more multi- dimensional view of mindfulness. The disparity here between many schools' initiative to launch mindfulness programs to address short-term aims versus the more traditional view of integrating mindfulness to improve overall quality of life is significant.

As schools continue to adopt mindfulness program initiatives, it would be prudent for administrators to evaluate the suitability of such decisions to ensure alignment with the institution's vision and community needs. Regardless of whether the school is a public or private, international or state-run institution, it is important to assess the learning needs of individual students. By establishing an initial needs assessment, institutions will account for local and cultural influences which would help determine whether implementation of a mindfulness program would be a sound decision. By the end of this year-long research inquiry, it was reasonable to deduce that the test students from Amsterdam would not be engaging in mindfulness practice regularly, based on their reflections. It is also plausible that the students from Bangkok, on the other hand, would continue to embrace meditation and mindfulness practice as they continue to navigate their daily lives. This distinction in practice and purpose is why school districts and policy makers need to take heed when considering mindfulness programs as a conduit for improved academic performance.

11.4 Implications for current literature on mindfulness

One of the main quandaries regarding mindfulness hovers around the notion of its universal application, when a universal definition does not currently exist. As noted in 2.2, there are accepted definitions that have concretized in the West for application in various clinical and business settings, but it has been truncated from its original roots. By placing emphasis on the universality of mindfulness as a human phenomenon and removing its spiritual context, mindfulness has become commodified and more readily accepted as a favorable practice that has cropped up in classrooms. This research study has demonstrated the significance of definition and meaning in the experience of mindfulness and its relationship to learning. The findings from this research provide

evidence that supports, challenges and extends the current literature on mindfulness in schools.

11.4.1 Mindfulness, defined

As the literature suggests, a universally established definition of mindfulness does not currently exist, yet it is commonly accepted that its practice bodes well for mental and emotional well-being. Reflecting upon the findings from this research study, it is important to note how different systems have chosen adapted definitions of mindfulness to suit their objectives. The commonly acknowledged definition of mindfulness in the West, of 'compassionate, non-judgmental moment-to-moment awareness' (Nhat Hanh 2015, Williams and Penman 2011, Kabat-Zinn 2005, Thera 1962), is the commodified version of the phenomenon that has gained acceptance in schools. From Buddhist hermeneutics, the Sanskrit word *sati* has evolved from *memory* to *mindfulness* representing the awareness of impermanence in the nature of all things from an ethical standpoint (Rhys Davids 1910).

The critical difference in definitions represent how the transference of mindfulness practice can vary from the onset. The Western, secular version, defined and interpreted in English, is the rendering that the Amsterdam test students experienced. The Thai students, regardless of test or reference, were equipped with more words to describe mindfulness, and did so from an ethical point of view. To them, mindfulness indeed represented awareness, but this extended to consciousness in thought, speech and action in order to live well. Effectively, the student experiences from this comparative research study correspond to their culturally constructed understanding of mindfulness. The Amsterdam students' surface understanding of mindfulness led to practices that were short term and short lived; the Bangkok students' culturally complex understanding of mindfulness led to practices that reflected a way of life.

11.4.2 Contribution to knowledge – how this study has supported, extended and challenged the current literature

When first embarking on this research journey, it was an extreme privilege to have the opportunity to capture the firsthand experiences of students from two different contexts. The phenomenological design of this study allowed for breadth and depth in

the data analysis, with no intimation of how the student voices would translate. The initial interest in pursuing research in the area of mindfulness was underpinned by existing literature on its historical roots, clinical efficacy and recognition of its commodification in various institutions (Purser 2019, Brahmapundit 2017, Dreyfus 2011, Gethin 2011). As the research unfolded over the course of a year, the rich data captured from the phenomenological design reflect original findings that both extend and challenge the current literature.

The literature reviews discourse on the importance of attention in learning (Rieber and Robinson 2004, Krishnamurti 1963) and how this premise bodes well for mindfulness in the classroom (Nhat Hanh 2017, Hyland 2016, Zenner et al. 2014, Mapel 2012). The student reflections from this study extend this theory in their understanding and interpretation of mindfulness. As seen from the Amsterdam test students, mindfulness appeared to enhance attention to learning, whereas the students from Bangkok (both test and reference) believed that paying attention was intrinsic to the mindful experience. Furthermore, the literature from mindfulness in schools' programs such as Mindwell and MiSP assert that adults have never actually taught children how to pay attention. This research has challenged this assertion and demonstrated that students in Bangkok have indeed been taught this skill, based on cultural and religious traditions. The commodification of mindfulness, once more, can give rise to different experiences and interpretations – possibly minimizing the integrity of a human phenomenon deserving of respect.

11.5 Limitations of the study

The objective of conducting a research study spanning two schools and countries led to a number of limitations that presented themselves over the course of the year of data collection. From the initial stages, there were several contrasting variables from the sample student groups. The school in Amsterdam was a diverse mix of nationalities and genders. The school in Bangkok however, was homogenous in cultural background and gender. Despite this early drawback in the research, the fact that both schools shared an interest in mindfulness programs was a defining precondition.

Another limitation of the study was in regard to the participant selection process. In Amsterdam, participants were more randomly selected due to the use of a google form survey. Permissions were more limited in Bangkok and access to students was more restricted so the participants were selected by school administration and staff. The aims of the research study were clearly outlined both orally and in written form at both schools, but the fact that student participants in Bangkok were determined by the school must be noted. Although it is possible that students in Bangkok may have been susceptible to some degree of influence, the internal school selection process was also determined by a brief survey, similar to the google form process in Amsterdam.

As previously mentioned, the issue of positionality was a careful consideration. While both schools were aware of my interest in mindfulness in schools given the scope of my research design, neither institution had a definitive grasp of my own philosophical stance on the phenomenon. Even so, I remained conscious of my role of researcher and maintained an objective stance throughout the study to the best of my ability. All students understood that this research was a culminating project for my doctorate thesis so to the extent possible, I established a mutual understanding with students as researcher and participant engaged in an exploratory learning experience.

Finally, during the post-interviews in Bangkok, when it came to my awareness that test students were based solely on personal meditation practice and not part of a formal program like the students in Amsterdam, this was initially a complication. This hurdle was an educational moment requiring significant reflection and a re-evaluation of how rigid mindfulness practice needed to be. Intent on moving forward with the research, I resolved that the spirit of the research remained intact. Both test groups consisted of students interested in partaking in mindfulness practice while the reference groups were predominantly interested in following their own learning journeys irrespective of mindfulness practice. Ultimately, the possibility to glean qualitative data from students within the same developmental stage from two disparate locations remained a considerable opportunity.

11.6 Opportunities for future research

This thesis initially aimed to explore the extent to which mindfulness could serve as a conduit for student learning. Based on the findings from a full calendar year, with a particular spotlight on the four exemplar student cases, the data brings to light some compelling information around student perceptions of the cultural constructs of the mind and the interplay between this understanding and the experience of learning. Through the student voices, this study has provided an inside glimpse of various individual attributes that contribute to the learning experience. The exploration in how mindfulness programs in schools are conducted in different contexts has also illustrated the impact and implications of policy borrowing.

The fact that mindfulness programs are widespread in schools deserves continued inquiry around its implementation and effectiveness. Considerable research has been conducted to review programs and examine pre and post student experiences, but very few stems directly from the student voice. While understandably more time intensive, it would be worthwhile to pursue research that captures direct student experience in order to appreciate a fuller picture of the phenomenon in question. A longitudinal approach to study the relationship between mindfulness experience and learning would also be informative, since time is required for participants to reap the benefits of mindfulness practice.

This thesis has also broached the idea of policy borrowing in light of mindfulness becoming an increasingly prevalent trend for schools' well-being initiatives. The implementation of mindfulness programs prior to any formal needs assessment can lead to a number of implications for policy and practice. As discussed previously, when schools import a policy or practice such as mindfulness, it is remiss to presume that this phenomenological experience will lead to universal results. While the literature advocates that mindfulness is a universal, human phenomenon, the path towards mindfulness varies greatly. The implications of policy borrowing in the form of mindfulness programming are significant due to the nature of cultural and individual perceptions. Thus, it would be well worth exploring whether mindfulness is a suitable fit for the well-being objectives set by schools.

In the same vein, my research inquiry represents the first of its kind to explore these different cultural interpretations of mindfulness and the subsequent impact on the learning

experience. While an ambitious undertaking, considering the comparative nature of examining student experience from diverse cultures and in two languages, the resultant findings have been rich with new insight on the topic of mindfulness in schools. Replicating this type of research would be compelling in order to learn whether it would yield similar outcomes. Moreover, this study investigated the phenomenological experiences of Thai youth and a select group of international youth; further exploration into the distinct cultural interpretations within an international group could potentially lead to even more insights into the relationship between mindfulness and learning.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it would be worthwhile to continue exploring cultural constructs of the mind. This idea is extremely relevant for educators, particularly those interested in incorporating mindfulness programs into their instructional curricula, because how we understand the mind impacts the experience of mindfulness. Both conceptually and in practice, mindfulness crosses fields of philosophy, psychology, religion and education. As the findings from this thesis have shown, the student reflections on their experience of mindfulness and learning led to corollary insights on the impact of one's motivation, willpower and internal locus of control. These phenomenological dimensions of personal experience surfaced when students reflected on their experiences of learning and mindfulness.

Given the international scope of mindfulness, it is an opportune time to continue studies in this area of educational research. There are many remaining questions that deserve further exploration in the realm of mindfulness programming, individual student experience, and authenticity of secular mindfulness practice. Continued research will provide greater insight on ideal conditions to support adolescents with learning and development. Further exploration in these areas would be promising for both pedagogical and mindfulness practices to improve our understanding of how to enrich learning as well as quality of life.

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Chapter 12: Appendices

Appendix A – Consent forms

Mary Hayden
Head of Department
Department of Education
University of Bath

2nd November 2017

Dear Mary,

Re: Monchaya Jetabut

This letter confirms that Monchaya Jetabut has permission to undertake research into "Mindfulness Practice as a Conduit for Student Learning" at the School of

understands that a small number of students will be involved in the research and that individual permission from these participants, and their parents, will also be obtained.

Yours sincerely,

Associate Director for Teaching and Learning

Email:

November 1, 2017

Dear High School Family,

My name is Ms. Monchaya Jetabut, and I am a school counselor here at the I Schoo . I am conducting doctoral research to explore the effects of mindfulness on student learning. Over the course of eight weeks, your child will complete the .b Mindfulness in Schools curricula that will introduce them to techniques that will support them in their ability to focus and become more aware of the present moment. I am interested in investigating the impact of this curricula on your student's learning. Your child has demonstrated interest in participating in this research so I would like to extend an invitation for him/her to participate in this study.

By winter break, I would like to conduct a pre-interview with your child to gauge their experience of the .b program. Starting in January 2018, they are invited to take part in reflective journaling about their experience of learning and engagement in school.

Since I am interested in learning whether mindfulness has an impact on student learning, I am asking students to engage with the process of reflective journaling for a full year (January 2018- December 2018) in order to glean sufficient information about the experience of learning from the student's voice. Journaling has been known to enhance the experience of learning and increase self-awareness. Furthermore, the student will have a fair amount of freedom in how they would like to engage with their journal – be it daily or weekly, and whether as a narrative or through bulleted thoughts.

Students will be provided with a standard lined A5 journal in which to record their reflections. Through quarterly notifications, I will gently remind student participants to continue the process of reflective journaling. By the end of the year, I will collect these journals in order to analyze their reflections. I will share the results of my research with administration and staff as well as my supervisors at the University of Bath (England), but I will not use your child's name. It is my hope that any insights gained from student reflections will add to the burgeoning research on mindfulness in schools.

Students who complete this year-long study will receive a gift card as a small token of appreciation. Additionally, if any student finds the experience of journaling too burdensome, they are welcome to withdraw from the study at any time.

Your signature below indicates that you grant permission for me to conduct a pre- and post-interview with your child, allow them to participate in reflective journaling and share results of the study as outlined previously. Please feel free to contact me at any time with any questions or comments.

Best regards,

Monchaya Jetabut
School Counselor

November 1, 2017

Dear High School Family,

My name is Ms. Monchaya Jetabut, and I am a school counselor here at the
Schoo I am conducting doctoral research to explore student perceptions of learning. My research seeks to understand the extent of student awareness of their learning. Your student has been selected at random and I would like to extend an invitation for your student to participate in this study.

Before the winter break, I would like to conduct a pre-interview with your student to gauge their experience of learning thus far in their school career. Starting in January 2018, they are invited to take part in reflective journaling about their experience of learning and engagement in school.

I will be asking students to engage with the process of reflective journaling for a full calendar year (January 2018- December 2018) in order to glean sufficient information about the experience of learning from the student's voice. Journaling has been known to enhance the experience of learning and increase self-awareness. Furthermore, the student will have a fair amount of freedom in how they would like to engage with their journal – be it daily or weekly, and whether as a narrative or through bulleted thoughts.

Students will be provided with a standard lined A5 journal in which to record their reflections. Through quarterly notifications, I will gently remind student participants to continue the process of reflective journaling. By the end of the calendar year, I will collect these journals in order to analyze their thoughts and reflections. I will share the results of my research with administration and staff as well as my supervisors at the University of Bath (England), but I will not use your student's name. It is my hope that any insights gained from student reflections will add to burgeoning research on direct student experiences of their education.

Students who complete this year-long study will receive a gift card as a small token of appreciation. Additionally, if any student finds the experience of journaling too burdensome, they are welcome to withdraw from the study at any time.

Your signature below indicates that you grant permission for me to conduct a pre- and post-interview with your student, allow them to participate in reflective journaling and share results of the study as outlined previously. Please feel free to contact me at any time with any questions or comments.

Best regards,

Monchaya Jetabut
School Counselor
mjeta

I have read the foregoing information and grant permission for my student to participate in this study as outlined. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

Print Name of Parent: _____

Signature of Parent: _____

Parent email: _____

Date (day/mo/year): _____

I have read the foregoing information and understand the purpose of this research. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print Name of Student: _____

Signature of Student: _____

Student email: _____

Date (day/mo/year): _____

พฤศจิกายน 2560

เรียนผู้ปกครองที่เคารพ

ดิฉัน นางสาว มนชยา เจตบุตร อาจารย์ที่ปรึกษาโรงเรียนนานาชาติ.
ดิฉันกำลังอยู่ในระหว่างการค้นหาข้อมูลเกี่ยวกับความเข้าใจของนักเรียนในเรื่องการศึกษาเล่าเรียน
การศึกษาวิจัยนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อที่จะค้นคว้าหาข้อมูลถึงขอบเขตความเข้าใจของนักเรียนในการศึกษาของแต่ละคน
บุตรธิดาของท่านได้แสดงความสนใจที่จะร่วมมือในการค้นคว้านี้ ดังนั้น ดิฉันจึงขอเรียนเชิญบุตรธิดาของท่าน
ให้ได้เข้ามามีส่วนในการค้นคว้าครั้งนี้ด้วย ในเดือนธันวาคมนี้ดิฉันจะดำเนินการสัมภาษณ์ล่วงหน้ากับบุตรธิดาของท่าน
เพื่อที่จะประเมินประสบการณ์ของเด็กเกี่ยวกับการฝึกหัดให้รู้จัก การมีสติ เริ่มต้นเดือนมกราคม 2561
บุตรธิดาของท่านได้รับเชิญให้เริ่มเข้ามาไตร่ตรองและจดบันทึกอย่างละเอียดเกี่ยวกับประสบการณ์ที่เขามีต่อการเรียนและ
ความเกี่ยวข้องที่มีกับโรงเรียน ดิฉันจะขอให้นักเรียนจดบันทึกเป็นเวลาหนึ่งปี (มกราคม-ธันวาคม 2561)
เพื่อที่จะได้รวบรวมข้อมูลได้เพียงพอเกี่ยวกับประสบการณ์การเล่าเรียนของนักเรียนจากการแสดงความคิดเห็นของนักเรียน
เอง การจดบันทึกได้เป็นที่รับรองว่าเป็นการเพิ่มพูนส่งเสริมประสบการณ์ในการเรียนรวมทั้งเป็นการเพิ่มการมีสติ
และรู้จักความเป็นตัวเองมากขึ้น นอกจากนั้น นักเรียนจะมีอิสระในการจดบันทึกนี้ ไม่ว่าจะบันทึกประจำวัน
ประจำอาทิตย์ และไม่ว่าการจดบันทึกนี้จะเป็นไปแบบการเล่าเรื่อง หรือ เป็นความคิดที่เกิดขึ้นโดยฉับพลัน
เมื่อถึงสิ้นปี ดิฉันจะรวบรวมเก็บบันทึกของนักเรียนนี้เพื่อที่จะได้นำมาวิเคราะห์/วิจัย ดิฉันจะรายงานผลของการวิจัยนี้
ให้แก่เจ้าหน้าที่ที่โรงเรียนรวมทั้งหัวหน้างานที่ มหาวิทยาลัยบาทท์ ประเทศอังกฤษ University of Bath, England
แต่จะไม่มีการบ่งชื่อของนักเรียน ดิฉันหวังเป็นอย่างยิ่งว่า การที่ได้รับข้อมูลที่ละเอียด/ถ่องแท้จากนักเรียนนี้
จะมีผลดีในการศึกษาเกี่ยวกับโครงการการฝึกการมีสติในโรงเรียนซึ่งกำลังเป็นที่ฟื้นฟูกันอย่างแพร่หลาย
นักเรียนที่มีส่วนร่วมในการวิจัยข้อมูลนี้จะได้รับบัตรของขวัญสมนาคุณเป็นการขอบคุณ นอกจากนั้น
ถ้ามีนักเรียนท่านใหนเห็นว่าการบันทึกข้อมูลในหัวข้อนี้เป็นภาระมากเกินไปนักเรียนมีสิทธิ์ถอนตัวจากการร่วมบันทึกในหั
วข้อนี้ได้ทุกเวลา ลายเซ็นต์ข้างล่างนี้ เป็นการรับรองและยินยอม อนุญาติให้ดิฉันได้ดำเนินการสัมภาษณ์ทั้งก่อนและหลัง
กับบุตรธิดาของท่าน และอนุญาติให้บุตรธิดาของท่านได้มีส่วนเข้าร่วมในการวิจัยครั้งนี้
ถ้ามีคำถามหรือความเห็นอย่างไร กรุณาติดต่อดิฉันได้ทุกโอกาส

ด้วยความนับถือ

MJetabut

มนชยา เจตบุตร
อาจารย์ที่ปรึกษา
mjeta'

ข้าพเจ้าได้อ่านข้อมูลข้างบนทั้งหมดแล้ว

และอนุญาตให้บุตรธิดาของข้าพเจ้ามีส่วนร่วมในการวิจัยครั้งนี้ตามที่ได้กล่าวมาแล้วเบื้องต้น

ข้าพเจ้าได้รับโอกาสให้สอบถามเกี่ยวกับการวิจัยนี้ และได้รับคำตอบเป็นที่น่าพึงพอใจ

ชื่อ-สกุล ผู้ปกครอง _____

ลายเซ็นต์ผู้ปกครอง _____

อีเมลล์ผู้ปกครอง _____

วัน/เดือน/ปี _____

December 2018
End of research study consent form

[Informed Consent Form for _____]

As a student participant in this year-long study (January 2018-December 2018) conducted by Ms. Monchaya Jetabut, I grant consent for the collection of my reflection journal. As understood in my preliminary consent form, I realize that my name will not be used in this research study and any information garnered from my participation will be used for educational purposes only. I also understand that Ms. Jetabut will adhere to the following regulations:

'The University of Bath will comply with all relevant Data Protection Laws when processing personal data. "Data Protection Laws" means the Data Protection Act currently in force in the UK at the relevant time, the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and all other mandatory laws and regulations of the UK and the EU applicable to the processing of personal data by the University.'

Upon analysis of my journal, if Ms. Jetabut comes across any worrisome reflections that indicate that I may be a danger to myself or others, I understand that she will need to follow due diligence and report such information to the appropriate authorities to ensure my safety.

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to this final agreement of the study.

Print Name of Participant_____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent_____

Date _____

Day/month/year

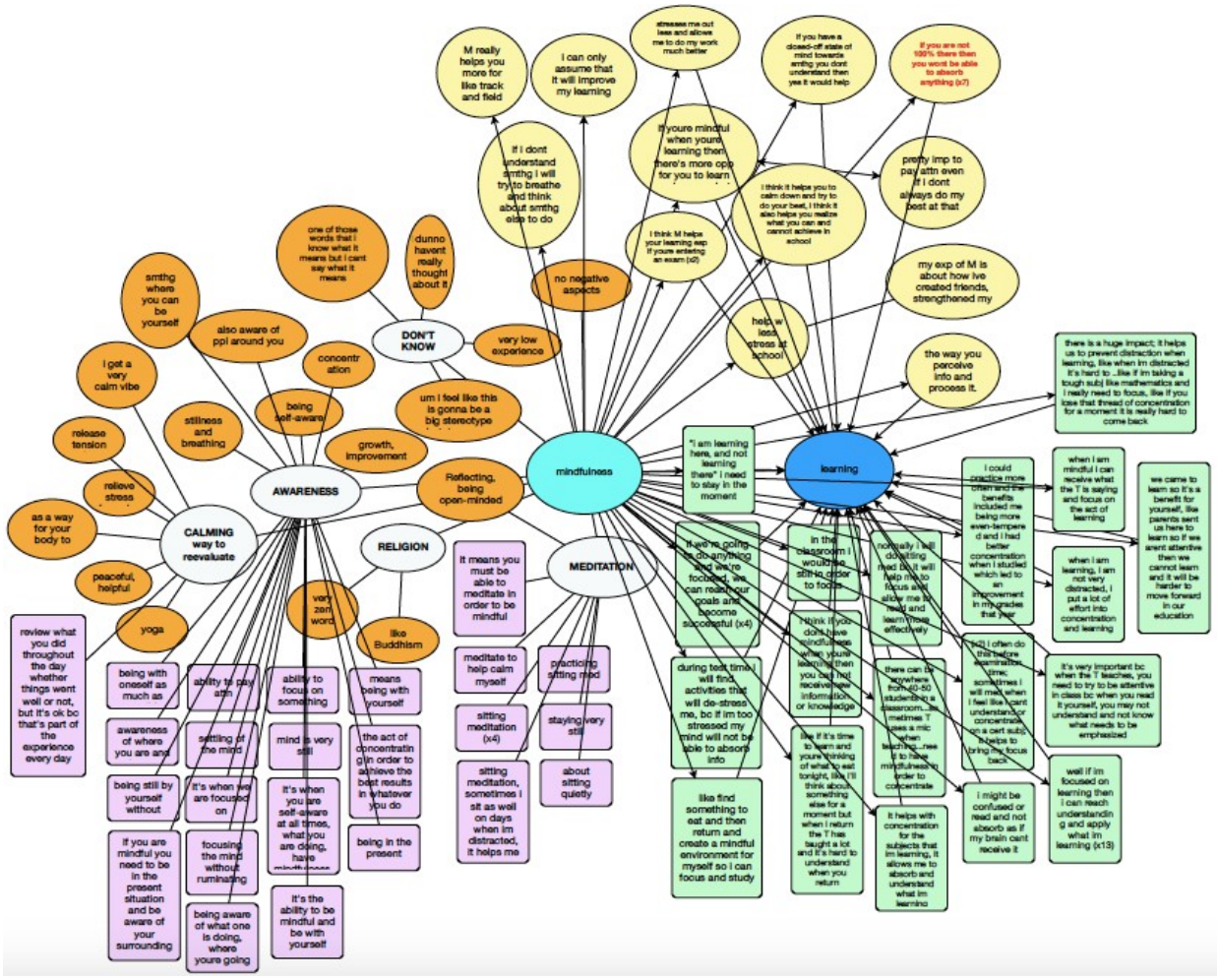
Appendix B – Interview questions in English and Thai

- How do you pay attention in class?
- นักเรียนให้ความสนใจอย่างไรในห้องเรียน
- How would you describe yourself as a student?
- นักเรียนเป็นนักเรียนประเภทไหน
- Word association: What words come to mind when you think of mindfulness?
- เมื่อกล่างถึงการมีสติ สิ่งแรกที่นึกถึงทันทีคือ.....
- Word association: What words come to mind when you think of learning?
- เมื่อพูดถึงการเรียน อะไรคือสิ่งแรกที่อยู่ในความนึกคิด
- How would you define learning?
- คำจำกัดความของคำว่า การเรียนรู้
- How do you know if you have learned something?
- นักเรียนรู้ได้อย่างไรว่าได้รับการเรียนรู้อะไรบ้างแล้ว
- Please share an example of a time you were able to master a new concept.
- ขอให้นักเรียนช่วยยกตัวอย่างเวลาที่รู้สึกว่าได้พบความสำเร็จในความคิด/แนวคิดใหม่ๆ
- What do you need to be able to learn at your best?
- นักเรียนคิดว่าต้องการสิ่งใดเป็นส่วนประกอบในการที่จะพบความสำเร็จในการเรียน
- How important is the environment to your learning?
- สิ่งแวดล้อมสำคัญกับตัวนักเรียนมากน้อยแค่ไหนในการศึกษาเล่าเรียน
- What type of teaching style suits your learning style?
- การสอนแบบไหนเหมาะสมกับการเรียนของนักเรียน
- Do you participate in any kind of mindfulness program/practice?
- นักเรียนมีส่วนร่วมกิจกรรมเกี่ยวกับการฝึกสติบ้างหรือไม่

- What does mindfulness practice look like?
- การฝึกสติมีลักษณะอย่างไร
- How would you define mindfulness?
- ให้คำจำกัดความกับคำว่า "สติ"
- How would you describe your experience of mindfulness?
- อธิบายถึงประสบการณ์ในการฝึกสติ
- How might mindfulness impact your learning?
- การมีสติมีผลกับการเรียนอย่างไร
- How important is attention in learning?
- การตั้งใจเรียนมีความสำคัญอย่างไร
- What do you enjoy most about school? Favorite subjects?
- นักเรียนชื่นชอบอะไรมากที่สุด ในโรงเรียน วิชาที่ชอบมากที่สุด
- How do you know when you've understood a difficult concept?
- นักเรียนรู้ได้อย่างไรว่าได้เข้าใจแล้วถึงแนวคิดที่ค่อนข้างยาก
- How do you know when you don't understand?
- นักเรียนรู้ได้อย่างไรว่ายังไม่เข้าใจ
- What do you do when you don't understand?
- ทำอย่างไรเมื่อยังไม่เข้าใจ
- What strategies do you use to help you learn?
- นักเรียนมีวิธีการอย่างไรที่จะช่วย ในการเรียน
- What kinds of strategies does your school use to support your learning?
- โรงเรียนมีวิธีการอย่างไรที่จะช่วยนักเรียน ในเรื่องการเรียน
- How could your learning experience be better?
- มีวิธีใดที่จะช่วย ให้นักเรียนมีประสบการณ์ในการเรียนดีขึ้น

(additional question for post-interview)
24) If you engaged in any meditation or mindfulness practices this past year, how might have it impacted your learning?

Appendix C – Visual mapping of impressions of mindfulness



Appendix D – Sample post-interview transcription – Amsterdam

Q.1-describe	Q.2-enjoy	Q.3-what need to learn	Q.4-imp of env	Q.5-T style	Q.6-eg. master new conc	Q.7-how pay attn	Q.8-word.M	Q.9-word.L	Q.10-what does good learning look like
i would describe myself as hard working, um i hand my work in on time so im quite diligent, i do get stressed out quite easily with schoolwork and i want everything to be of the highest quality but im also known for procrastinating a little bit...i put in the maximum amount of effort for everything, at the last minute	i love my friendships at this school, and the life ive created with the peers and my community, the fact that ive been here for 9 yrs..it's become like a home to me bc ive been here for so long, my fave subjs are def my sciences, chem and bio but also some history	i need absolute quiet. i cant, i need some form of stress as a motivator bc i feel like i perform best not when i fully procrastinated to like the night before but like 3 nights before a test i need that goal of a test to really get my brain working, i also, i do work better alone, i dont work better in a group, i work best at home, i think	as in like, support? or like the environment? so, physically i need it to be cold and quiet, but i mean emotionally, since i do get quite stressed out and anxious about assignments esp when there's a lot going on at once, i do require support from my Ts and stuff. i dont like handing in my work late, cuz first of all i like getting it done with, but also i dont like making excuses	um, well now that im in the IB and i do take 2 HL sciences, i really do like the study by yourself and then you get that information reinforced in the classroom, i do like that bc i feel like im teaching myself, like im in control of my learning and it's also teaching me how i learn best alone, i feel like that's gonna be super useful in the future	um, well we uh...i just had a periodicity quiz in chemistry...it's one of the easier subjs in chem bc it's more knowledge based than mathematics based, and it's again you have to watch vdos before class then you learn the information in class, um, and i decided this time to take notes and it really helped me to listen and then write down and then be able to go	it really depends on the class, um, i yeah, when i get bored, i lose attn very easily and i end up getting very tired so it's harder for me to pay attn, but when i find something interesting then i really do listen and i remember everything from that class. i think it's mostly, kind of it's	spirituality, serenity, knowing yourself, um, and knowing when to stop, knowing your emotional bounderies and limits	school, hmwk, information	um i thnk it looks like, i think good learning is based on the T and i think if a T is really passionate abt something or really understands; like some Ts really understood how stressed i was from the play and they acknowledged that, they accepted that, some gave extensions for my work; being able to give information to the highest quality but

Q.11-how know if you learned	Q.12-what do when dont understand	Q.13-partake in M	Q.14-what M look like	Q.15-how define M	Q.16-how describe exp of M	Q.17-how M would impact L	Q.18-how imp attn in learning	Q.19-how youve understood diff concept	Q.20-how know when dont undrstand
when im able to teach it to someone else without any mistakes; when i feel comfortable explaining it to someone else other than myself	i generally first thing i do is check my notes again, or check my resources, or i go to my T and ask them; i sometimes get, i hate not understanding or not having any idea as to what going on, uncertainty freaks me out, sometimes i get really discouraged when i dont understand something, and i'll give up on the subj, that's what i	um, not like uh, ive been to, i go to therapy for my anxiety where ive practiced mindfulness a few times, but i prefer not to bc i feel like i learn more.. i do also when i go to sleep, i do practice the 'clenching, squeezing thing' like the body check or something, body scan and that really relieves stress	i think it looks like; the thing i see is like in TOK class, when we lie down, it's kind of like a mix of yoga and spirituality and everything, knowing yourself best, knowing yourself both psychologically and physically, like in a class or, ...	i would define M as a knowing yourself best both physically and psychologically and being able to do good for yourself and know when something is wrong with you and be able to fix it in a healthy way	i would describe it as successful when i do it, i dont do it often, as in with writing the journals that was a form of mindfulness bc it was a form of reflection, but i dont, i feel like i reflect when i talk to my therapist, i feel like i get more out when i speak bc it's a quicker means of reflecting, i didnt reflect that often in	it impacts me in a sense that im able to, i know when to stop and when to take a break, also im able to just know what i can accomplish and know when i need to stop and schoolwork definitely, when i get stressed out about schoolwork i am able to know what	i think it's incredibly important bc if you dont pay attn to what youre supposed to be learning then i dont think you can learn; i mean i dont think you hv to pay attn in class all the time bc sometimes that's impossible but you have to come back	um usually by tests or when im tested or when i test myself with a practice test or a review sheet and im able to do it without much problem, generally i know when im able to explain it to someone else, when im proud of what ive accomplished	i become quite anxious bc generally when i dont understand smthg it's usually smthg in school and, there's always i feel like a consequence of not understanding whether that be a bad grade or someone getting mad at you bc you didnt understand their situation and i dont want to deal with, so i generally get

Q.21-what strategies used to help learn	Q.22-strategies sch uses	Q.23-how could learning exp be better	Q.24-if you engaged in any M prog, how might it have impacted L?
i do a lot of memory based exercises bc that's what most of my clsses consist of, i review a lot with notes, and i write notes, do practice problems too	i, well there's always, my counselor's mr xxx and whenever i have a panic attack or i get stressed out at school, he's always there to help out and, im not sure if the Ts are aware, but i thnk if they were aware theyd be very understanding bc theyre fairly flexible when it comes to stress or anxiety bc they understand that the IB can be very stressful, i feel like there's a general sense of support in the community	i think if my Ts knew that i get stressed out easily it would be better and, it could also be easier if, for eg, like the musical, sports like NECIS, ive been both in sports and in musicals and from what ive seen and experienced, NECIS is taken as a more exhausting effort and ppl get more empathy for doing NECIS and theyre able to get extensions on most of their work but when it comes to stuff like the musical, in my opinion i feel like it's more exhausting than any kind of sport, i dont feel like there's that much empathy	i think it, i was def self-aware um, and i was able to obviously learn more about what tactics suit me best and what i learn best from, it also taught me more learned what my limits are, when i need to stop, i know when to be stressed out and when not to be stressed out, when i feel like i can accomplish smthg, i can schedule myself around this idea that ive learned, not in the past year, but definitely in the past few months

Appendix E – Sample post-interview transcription – Bangkok

Q.1-describe	Q.2-enjoy	Q.3-what need to learn	Q.4-imp of env	Q.5-T style	Q.6-eg. master new conc	Q.7-how pay attn	Q.8-word.M	Q.9-word.L	Q.10-what does good learning look like
you mean how i am now? like right now at school, reviewing my learning is so important for me right now, feel like reviewing and re-reading helps me to remember better, it's not like before, i used to leave the class and throw away the notes, but i need to review in every class now, it's so imp, using practice	if we're talking about now, subjs i like would be bio as before, i dont hate physics as much, i do my best in chem; cont to try sometimes i fail, like yesterday i tested in math and i think i passed, maybe it was easy...the subj that i think i can do well is bio...im such an active student, involved	i think it's practice and review, need to find areas where i faltered; i observe in myself careless mistakes, areas i overlooked so i need to be more careful in the future to make it better	for me, i like reading at home, it's quiet and peaceful; i can only study at home, cant read outside at all bc no focus, i get distracted and am not mindful, at home it's comfortable and i hv better chance of understanding	mm, if now, i need the T to teach areas that i may have overlooked, but most imptantly i need a T who really teaches to understand not just overview concepts; right now i have this style of teaching so it's like i havent learned anything and i hv to come home and review further on my own or	(Explained Q) usually, i feel like i dont really think outside of the box often, i mean not in the framework completely but i dont always follow others thinking, im in the middle...can sway at times	i will listen closely to what the T is saying; esp if it's an imp course that i need to know, esp if there is a lot to cover, or if it's a good teaching then i dont hv to review, and i try to do this for every class; it's imp to listen to T in class	mindfulness in the act of speaking; speaking to others thoughout life; i feel like words can be knives that can pierce people's hearts, as for myself i can be very sensitive with friends' words, sometimes friends may not think too deeply about their words but i think about what is said and how we communicate...so many words, i may think um, sometimes i think it is better to not say anything bc it may be hurtful, but i know not everyone has to be like me bc we are all diff, but i think it is a way to	learning? it's like, for me now, it's like learn, pay attn for the future, next several years, i have to test into uni so that enough is stressful, be i mean i know that im not the best student im in the middle, also not the worst, i feel like...this country, in my opinion, esp adults, they give a lot of imp to uni rankings	it's not limited to the classroom, it's everywhere around you, it can be anything that you never knew before, something you didnt knw about before can become new knowledge for you

Q.11-how know if you learned	Q.12-what do when dont understand	Q.13-partake in M	Q.14-what M look like	Q.15-how define M	Q.16-how describe exp of M	Q.17-how M would impact L	Q.18-how imp attn in learning	Q.19-how know youve understood diff concept	Q.20-how know when dont undrstand
how do i know? know when i realize i didnt know it before...like learning for the first time that 2x2=4; learning a new way to do things; a new path to get home, this is also new knowledge	if now, i would ask friends, but if it's abt hmwk, i would ask friends to share how they did it, i wouldnt copy but i would use their help to try to do it; but mostly listen to the T even if i am not as mindful from time to time, due to tiredness (laughs)	every week, the meditation sessions by the school; sometimes it's twice a week, i forget smtimes but i participate, there's meditation practice but also mindful moments of silence for eg for the late King Rama the 9th, like this...9 minutes sometimes up to 20	mindfulness practice? i think it's about being with yourself, need to not be distracted with anything, if focusing on something need to be with that one thing, not swaying to other things, that's not it, need to be able to focus on one thing	as i said, it's about being with yourself, being mindful, being with yourself, how do i say this, it's being with yourself dont know how to explain it, you hv to be with yourself but it's not just about ignoring everything around you but mainly to be with yourself	well, mindfulness practice, every yr the school has us go on a dhamma field trip where we do sitting med, listen to the monks, listen to them, for 2-3 days, i think it's sitting med, walking med, feeling mindful, being with oneself, following their words moment to moment, being with	it allows you to receive the knowledge from the T more thoroughly, you wont be as distracted, when you are mindful and are with the T you can receive the information fully, like what i said before smtimes i come home and cant recall everything, the T has the expert	if it's about paying attn, i think it's imp bc there are so many courses; i used to not listen to the T or think i couldnt do it, it was too hard, or i wasnt good at it, but it's really up to me that im not open to it, but now these courses that im in the midst of i now see that i can do it, it's about me being open to receiving the knowledge	if i think ive understood it, then i can talk about it, can summarize what ive learned, if i can speak freely about it or summarize in my head, tell others abt it that means ive understood it	well, not being able to speak abt it, like if i understand i can discuss it, make connections; but if i dont understand it's as if smthing is missing, there's a board where...i'd have to ask someone who can help explain, fill the gaps

Q.21-what strategies used to help learn	Q.22-strategies sch uses	Q.23-how could learning exp be better	Q.24-if you engaged in any M prog, how might it have impacted L?
well if it's a subj that requires reading, memorization, i would read first, overview, take notes for myself, or for review, what's imp is that i need to be able to explain what ive written, if i can explain my own notes that means im ready	the school? well, the school has an organization that is about learning and non-learning; club for movies, activities, etc. but this yr im in an acad group, yr 5 im in another acad group, this yr im in a science group so i have to prepare for competitions...etc.	maybe, they could let us try a course to see if it is of interest, whether it's a fit or not, so if we audit a course and find a good match we can continue with that path and do well, etc..	for me, i admit that i can be lazy, too lazy to do sitting med, i dont sit everyday you know, for me i havnt seen much impact, maybe it's bc i dont hv continuous practice; when i do i do feel calmer, but if i were to med continuously as a habit maybe it could help me change into a diff direction, be a pers who is more mindful but since i dont practice consistently, only once a week or skip altogether, im constantly thinking abt what i need to be doing, im a person who is inconsistent with following plans, etc..description of self

Appendix F – Sample NVivo thematic analysis

Files\\Student groups AMS & BKK - interview analysis
119 references coded, 1.68% coverage

Reference 1: 0.01% coverage

the best way for me is to **focus** on the T and listen. if i'm writing notes i might just hear one good phrase and not hear what else is being talked about. sometimes hard to pay attn; i can be a daydreamer and it can be hard for me to focus. looking at the T helps me to focus

Reference 2: 0.01% coverage

the best way for me is to focus on the T and listen. if i'm writing notes i might just hear one good phrase and not hear what else is being talked about. sometimes hard to pay **attn**; i can be a daydreamer and it can be hard for me to focus. looking at the T helps me to focus

Reference 3: 0.01% coverage

the best way for me is to focus on the T and listen. if i'm writing notes i might just hear one good phrase and not hear what else is being talked about. sometimes hard to pay attn; i can be a daydreamer and it can be hard for me to **focus**. looking at the T helps me to focus

Reference 4: 0.01% coverage

the best way for me is to focus on the T and listen. if i'm writing notes i might just hear one good phrase and not hear what else is being talked about. sometimes hard to pay attn; i can be a daydreamer and it can be hard for me to focus. looking at the T helps me to **focus**

Reference 5: 0.01% coverage

i think if youre **mindful** when youre learning then there's more opp for you to learn and grasp what is being taught. yeah, it's the way you perceive info and process it.

Reference 6: 0.01% coverage

in an enviornment like this in school, i think it's pretty imp to pay **attn** even if i dont always do my best at that. it's def an imp aspect...in order to focus and absorb all of it

Reference 7: 0.01% coverage

in an enviornment like this in school, i think it's pretty imp to pay attn even if i dont always do my best at that. it's def an imp aspect...in order to **focus** and absorb all of it

Reference 8: 0.01% coverage

one that isnt so much **focused** on giving info and having us regurgitate it but having us reflect on what we learn and doing something with it

Reference 9: 0.03% coverage

reflecting, being open-**minded**...word respect comes to mind

Reference 10: 0.02% coverage

reflecting, being open-minded...word respect comes to **mind**

Reference 11: 0.01% coverage

extremely, if there is a lack of **attn** from the st from the T then the info trying to be conveyed will be vague

Reference 12: 0.01% coverage

well, other than paying **attn** and taking notes when im home, im doing a methos ...work 25 min, break for 10, work 25 break for 10